This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

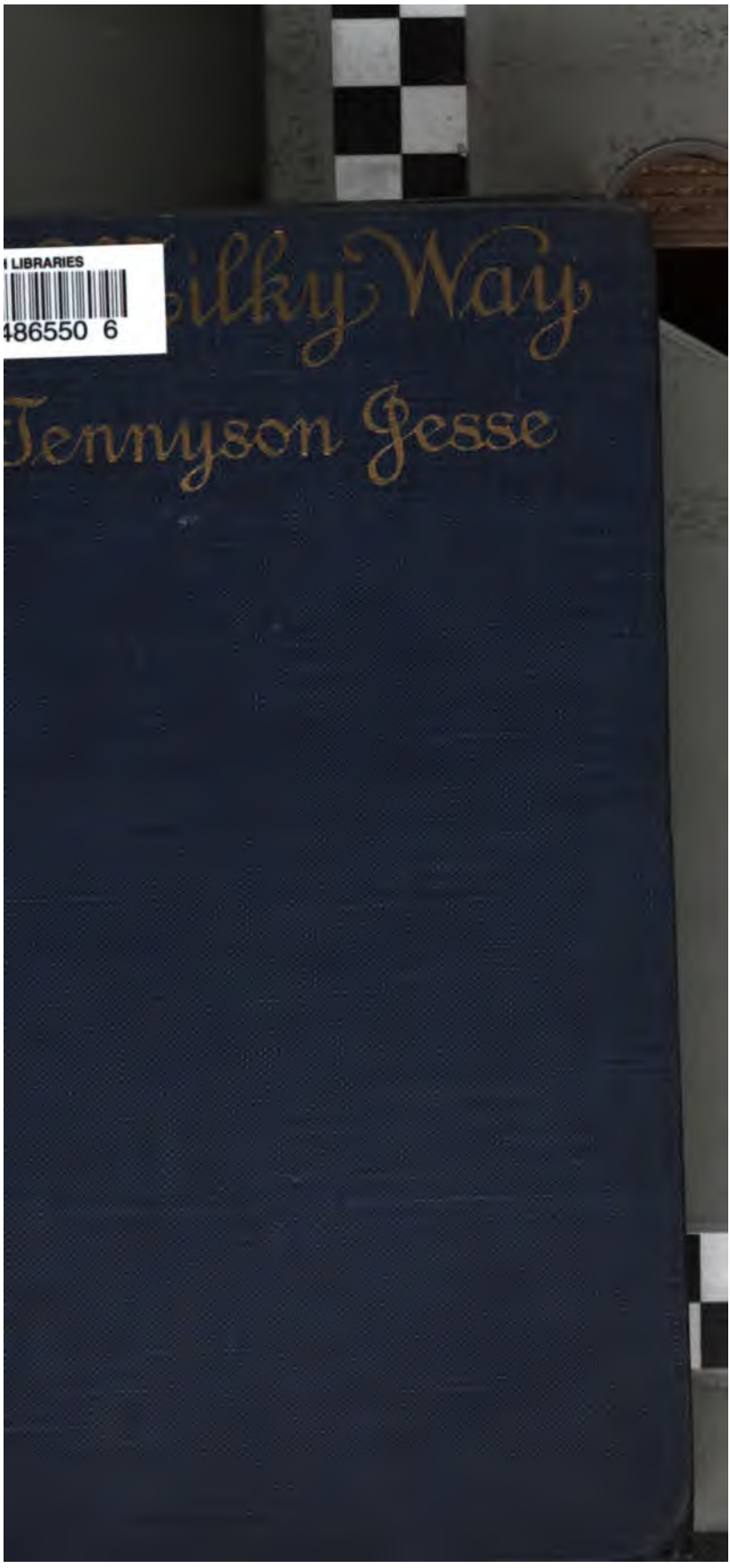
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


LIBRARIES
4865506
Silky Way
Fennyson Jesse

For
Robert Gorman
from
Fryn Tennyson Jesse
with remembrances & best wishes.

NCW

THE MILKY WA

F. TENNYSON JES

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE MILKY WAY

ROBERT P. COWAN
RUA DE MERCADO 51
RIO DE JANEIRO

BY

F. TENNYSON JESSE

"HE WHO IS LIGHT OF HEART AND HEELS
CAN WANDER IN THE MILKY WAY"

Provençal Proverb.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
135014B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1941 L

Copyright, 1914,
By George H. Doran Company

Copyright, 1913,
By Metropolitan Magazine Company

TO

ELIZABETH STANHOPE FORBES

Dearest,—

At first I thought this too light and slight a book to give you, but then I remembered it is to you anything of good in it, as in its author, is so largely due, that both are yours already.—F.

RECEIVED JUN 12 1911

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	General Cargo	11
II	Ship-Magic	19
III	Salt-Water Philosophy	25
IV	The Last of the "Chough"	33
V	The Last of Harry	39
VI	London River	44
VII	Haggett's	52
VIII	Some Talk and a New Toy	61
IX	The Call to Arms	68
X	Being Fey	73
XI	Where the 'Bus Went	84
XII	The Babes in St. John's Wood	93
XIII	We Increase and Multiply	105
XIV	A Flutter in Fleet Street	117
XV	Secrecy Farm	126
XVI	What I Found under the Pillow	138
XVII	The Rape of the Lock	143
XVIII	First Maurice and then Edgar	154
XIX	My Four Houses	163
XX	What I Told the Acanthus Leaf	170
XXI	Spells	177
XXII	An Epitaph	184

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIII	The Odds and Ends	190
XXIV	A Long-lost Parent	200
XXV	Pan at Covent Garden	208
XXVI	We "Leap Screaming"	218
XXVII	"Seals of Love, but Sealed in Vain"	227
XXVIII	Abroad	231
XXIX	A Skeleton out of the Cupboard	239
XXX	I Get Me to a Nunnery	247
XXXI	Mostly on Food and Money	256
XXXII	I Begin to Understand	265
XXXIII	Via Amoris—(1) The Court of Love	275
XXXIV	Via Amoris—(2) Aucassin and Nicolete	289
XXXV	Via Morris—(3) Petrarch and Laura	302
XXXVI	The World Obtrudes Itself	313
XXXVII	The View from the Attic	323

THE MILKY WAY

THE MILKY WAY

CHAPTER I

GENERAL CARGO

THERE was no evading the fact that my luck had left me—left me so completely that my nerve suddenly failed me and I wrote to Harry and said "Yes." With the letter in the pocket of my one and only coat I sat on Penzance quay and wished I had a hundred a year of my own.

A small steamer of some 400 tons was awaiting the afternoon tide to make the harbour, and gazing at her idly, I thought over my decision. Was I glad I had agreed to marry Harry? How absurd it sounded—Marry Harry, Harry marry! It would be good to be taken care of and to have no anxiety about the morrow, of that much I was sure. I had just finished a set of water-colour illustrations to a book on Cornwall for Messrs. Heriot & Dale, which they had no sooner received than they went bankrupt. Farewell to the fat little cheque which meant a winter in Paris, farewell to a winter anywhere save in the workhouse, for I had exactly thirty-eight shillings and threepence left in the world. It was the final blow, for having just recovered from a bad attack of "flu," I was still a worm and no man.

The Milky Way

That was how it came about that I had the letter to Harry in my pocket—the letter which told him I had changed my mind, and as I sat on the quay I assured myself that I fully meant to post it—for I was in what I can only call "the shoulder mood." Although at that time I thought there should be only two classes of men as far as marrying was concerned—the Inevitable and the Impossible, with one man in the former and all the rest of the world in the latter—I could still see that that was a counsel of perfection. A great many marriages are the result of almost any man coming along at just the right moment, when the girl is in the grip of the shoulder mood—which, I suppose, attacks chiefly lonely people like myself. In that mood one is conscious of only one overwhelming desire—to have a shoulder against which to lean one's head, with one's eyes shut —any nice, quiet, unobtrusive shoulder. Up till then luckily enough, the mood and the man had never come together for me; by the time he appeared the mood had vanished under the influence of a night's sleep, or sunshine, or a piece of work going well, and so I was still Viv Lovel. Now, "flu," and the failure of Heriot & Dale had bolstered up the shoulder mood till it had resulted in the letter in my pocket; and, shutting my eyes, I leant against the hard side of the lighthouse, trying to imagine it was Harry's shoulder, so that I might arrive at a forecast of my sensations. It would be restful to feel his arms round me and give up the struggle; yet some silly tears forced their way past my lashes—I had held my head so high and flown the banner of independence through straits nearly as narrow as this, but "flu" is an insidious devil. Opening my eyes I saw that the steamer had swung round on the tide and was making for

the harbour; on the bridge the skipper moved about, his cap very white and his face and neck very glowing against the sparkling blue of the May sky.

I walked to the empty wharf where she would berth, and watched her as she sidled slowly towards the quay, the sunlight vivid on her vermilion lead-paint, and making her black hull a soft greenish tone like an old coat. Her masts and ropes were burnished gold against a tangle of schooner rigging that lay in shadow behind, and in the sluggishly rippled harbour water the vermilion and orange reflections broke and joined again. Without warning the sea-lure gripped me. "I must go aboard," I thought, my foot impatient to feel again the planks of a deck.

A fat harbour-loafer who had been sitting pensively on a bollard arose to catch and make fast the rope; then, twisting his thick red neck, he glanced behind him and slowly brushed the seat of his trousers.

"Damn this new-fangled 'abit o' white-washin' the bollards!" he muttered. "A chap can't get a bit o' rest wi'out 'is trousies givin' 'im away!" He spat a much-chewed plug into the water, and cut a new piece off the liquorice-like stick before sitting down on a heap of scrap-iron.

As soon as the gang-plank was across I went on board, and ran into a rosy, round-faced little man with a dish-cloth over his arm.

"D'you happen to be sailing for London soon?" I asked, smiling upon him. "You are general cargo, aren't you?"

He beamed at me.

"We are, miss. Anything from pig-iron to pepper. We unload this afternoon, load again to-morrow morn-

ing, and sail at 'alf after five in the afternoon. Call at Plymouth and Torquay, and make London river by Thursday, all bein' well."

"D'you take passengers?"

"Well, miss, we don't belong to, but then we does it. In the season we has 'em packed like pilchards in the saloon; sleepin' on the tables with the fiddles on to keep 'em from rollin' to ground! This time o' year you can have the place to yourself. First-class fare fifteen shillin', two shillin' each your meals. Steerage, seven and six, and find your food. Intoxicants extra, but we ain't like the Scilly boat as don't carry a licence. If she do come up agen anything in the way o' waves she do knock her passengers about crool, and gives 'en nothin' but gas-water to comfort their innards!"

Monday to Thursday—my money would just last—and instead of posting my letter to Harry I would write and tell him to come on board and see me at Plymouth. So I reprieved myself.

"Have you a stewardess?" said I, beginning already the wifely duty of considering Harry's prejudices.

"Never carry one, miss. I'm all the stewardess there is."

"I'm sure, Mr.——. What is your name?"

"Nanverrow, miss."

"A good old Cornish name, Mr. Nanverrow!"

"'Tes that, miss!" he replied, beaming delightedly.

"Well, I'm sure, Mr. Nanverrow, that you'd look after me beautifully. You'd bring me hot water in the morning, wouldn't you?"

"Bring you anything you like, miss. Say the word, and the deck cabin shall be put ready for 'ee."

I did say the word, and walked off the *Chough* com-

mitted to arriving with my luggage at five o'clock on Monday afternoon.

I actually did arrive at twenty minutes past, a triumph of punctuality, and my landlady saw me off with many tears, and a large pasty in a paper bag. It was a blue-and-yellow, blustering kind of day, the wave tops stung to foam, and the cloud-shadows trailing swiftly over the hills beyond Marazion; on the harbour water floated great patches of many-hued iridescent scum, probably compounded of unutterableness, but burnished and beautiful as a pheasant's breast.

We steamed out of the harbour, and met the freshening breeze and the plash of the little waves; Penzance lay hidden in a misty blaze of sun, only St. Mary's tower showing faintly above the harbour, and on the Mount the castle windows winked like diamonds. Sticking my hands in my pockets, I flung up my chin to the salt wind and laughed aloud for joy that I was alone and free, till the thought of Harry came pricking at me.

"Never mind," thought I, "I'll get all the more juice out of my last days."

Dusk had fallen as we made the Lizard, and the great shaft of light was throwing itself over and over across the sky. As the captain and I sat at supper we got into the race of the tide; there were sounds of things slipping about and cabin doors sliding to, and the horizon shot up the porthole only to fall swiftly down it the next minute. A typical Cornishman of the seafaring order was the captain, with fair hair, a skin reddened by sun and wind, and a burly, bull-necked frame. Full of good yarns, too, and of a pretty wit; nothing could have been finer than the air with which he in-

formed my little Nanverrow, who waited on us, that "a lady on board gave a touch o' colour to the voyage."

After supper I went on to the bridge. It was too dark to see much but the glimmer of the foam as it slipped past us, but the sky boasted a new moon to which the captain uncovered, while I bowed thrice. We had left the rough water, a darker streak upon the grey sea, on our stern, and were throbbing a steady course, with no sound but the restless plashing of the sea and the subdued thrumming of the engines, when from the gloom of the lower deck came the notes of a pipe. Leaning over the bridge, I strained eyes and ears—someone was playing Dvořák's "Humoreske" and playing it well. Shrill and clear the thin jet of sound rose up and quivered in the night air, hung on a high, sweet note, and fell in a rippling cascade.

A pulse I had thought stilled began to beat, something that stung to a sense of youth and gaiety; Harry slipped into the background—what had my kind, staid Harry to do with these pipes of Pan? Down to the lower deck they lured me, always lilting to the measure in my blood. I plunged into the alley-way, and it seemed as though the piper, confident in his darkness, mocked at me. When I came to the stokehold door I suddenly slid it open, and a glare of red light shot into the gloom of the alley-way and lit up the figure of the piper. His piping stopped with a defiant flourish; and, the hot breath from the furnaces on my cheek, I stared at him. Oddly enough there was a look of a Faun about him; in the lock of fair hair tossed across his browner forehead, and in the bare throat on which his down-tucked chin cast a soft, three-cornered shadow. Straightening himself, he made a bow as I involuntarily stepped

forward. The joy of it when he said exactly the right thing! I could have blessed him for his comprehension.

"The great god Pan is not dead," he remarked in a low, very gentle voice, "while there is anyone left who knows how to listen."

"Do I understand you're a reincarnation?" I asked, sliding the stokehold door to again.

"Not exactly," he disclaimed modestly; "merely a descendant."

I stepped out of the alley-way on to the deck, and my piper followed me.

"Alas!" he said mournfully, "travelling incognito under the humble guise of a steerage passenger, I am not allowed on the upper deck. The joy of watching the wake is denied me, but there is always the fo'c'sle. Shall we go right up into the bows and play at being a figurehead?"

"It's quite a good game," I admitted. "I played it myself this afternoon."

"I know you did. I saw you. But, like all the games worth playing, it takes two."

"Like quarrelling?"

"Like quarrelling—or kissing—they both begin with a 'K,' I believe?"

"With a 'Q,' in the best houses."

"After all, it's the thing that matters. Kissing by any other name would still——"

"Lead to quarrelling. Look at the phosphorus, it's as though we struck sparks from the water."

We leant over the side in silence for a while, till, with a nervous gesture, he pressed his hands against his forehead as though it ached.

"Don't think me confoundedly impertinent playing to you like that," he broke out. "But you look—well, the right sort, the kind of girl who'd understand. You knew it *was* to you?"

"Who else could it have been to—that tune? It's a vagrant's air, made for the high road and the high seas. Does your head ache?"

"Nothing much."

Intuition seized me as I looked at him.

"You're needing food!" I exclaimed—I'd known what that was like myself. He made a gesture of denial, but I was already on the way to my cabin, whence I returned with my pasty.

"You're to eat this, now, at once. Don't dare to say a word," I commanded, stamping my foot at him. He took it, and I strolled a little distance away, returning as he finished the last morsel.

"You've made a different man of me," he said simply. "I can do nothing but play to you for it."

"Do play—not for the pasty, but to please me."

He laid the pipe to his lips, and through the darkness his long nimble fingers gleamed as they danced up and down. I sat sideways, my arm locked round the flagstaff, and as the ship plunged and rose again, shaking the hissing foam from her bows and quivering slightly all her length like a living creature, I let my body be one with her motion till I felt a princess of fairy story on some magic steed, riding—whither? I slipped down on to the deck and held out my hand.

"Good night, Peter Piper," I said. "I'm very tired, and four bells went just now. Good night, and thank you for your piping."

CHAPTER II

SHIP-MAGIC

I TURNED restlessly in my bunk for hours, and when at length I fell into a troubled sleep, it was to dream that the pipes of Pan were calling to me from some hidden place, while Harry was trying to hold me back. Shriller and shriller grew the piping, till it pierced my sleep, and I woke—to the scream of an unoiled crane and the rattle of the donkey-engine. It was four o'clock on a grey, rainy morning, and we were unloading our cargo at Plymouth.

Looking back on that day, I don't wonder at my own bad temper. The town lay wet and comfortless under a chilly, white sky, which reflected wanly in the dripping roofs and gleaming stretches of asphalt. After waiting for Harry till midday, I went ashore, lunched at a horrid little restaurant, and was back by three o'clock. No Harry. From imagining him dead in the ruins of the Exeter train, I advanced to the conclusion that he had become engaged to a minor canon's daughter. I was picturing the wedding (the bride, snub-nosed, and a model of all the virtues, in white satin), when Mr. Nanverrow handed me a telegram.

"Sorry been delayed," it ran. "If miss you at Plymouth will meet boat at Torquay."

"How like Harry to say 'boat,'" I reflected; then, remembering that the captain had said at breakfast that

we were not calling at Torquay this voyage, after all, I tore up the telegram in a rage.

We had cast off, and were slowly throbbing away from the side, when a tall figure raced down the quay, took a flying leap, and just landed on our deck. The captain, leaning over the bridge, shouted an indignant question, but the intruder merely demanded:

"Is Miss Lovel on board?"

"I'm here, Harry," I called from my doorway.

He took off his cap, from which the rain was dripping in a little stream, and stood looking at me. I don't know what he was thinking, but as I saw him, his limp, brown moustache, and limp, blue eyes, I thought, "He's more like himself than ever!"

He spoke first.

"Viv," he said, "Viv, it's 'yes,' isn't it? You've sent for me to tell me so, haven't you, dear?"

Then I saw I'd been mistaken—this was a new Harry, his face years younger with hope. Truth was the only thing.

"I don't know, Harry," I said. "I think it's 'yes,' but I can't quite tell you yet."

"D'you think you can figure it out before I have to land at Torquay?" asked Harry, who had gone rather white round the mouth. For a moment this absorbed my attention—I had often read of people who went suddenly pale, but I'd never seen it happen. Then the meaning of his words dawned on me, and though it seemed heartless, I sat down on my berth and laughed till I cried.

"Oh, Harry! We aren't putting in at Torquay, after all! We're going straight to London, and I've written to Barbara Vining to meet me, and I sha'n't have a rag

of reputation left, not a rag! She's a dear, but you know how she wants me to 'settle down,' and she'll rub it in that I ought to now, with you!"

"Good Lord! What on earth am I to do?"

"You'll have to lie low till she's borne me off."

"Lie low! Look at the size of the thing! A mouse couldn't hide! And that Miss Vining would nose out everything. If you were any other girl, I'd say, 'Now you'll have to marry me!' but I know it's only more likely to make you do the opposite."

"Well, don't let's bother yet. We don't reach Old Rat Wharf till Thursday. Go and see about a cabin, and join me on deck."

We spent the afternoon sitting on the port side of the bridge, with the weather-screen down to let the wet breeze blow in our faces. Thrashing up the Devon coast, past the rugged cliffs, whose crests were hidden by swirls of mist, we were sometimes so close in shore that we could see the gulls sitting on the rocks and the surf creaming in the crevices. Never had Harry been so dear—and yet—oh! why, why had I come by sea? Only the day before, I had been glad to be marrying Harry, now the old unrest was stirring—the divine unrest imparted by the fret of waves and the call of winds, and the strong, subtle smell of tarry ropes and wet decks; an unrest to which one either has the response in one's blood, when there is no resisting it, or to which one is impervious, when no comprehension of it is possible.

Harry, who has enough perception to know when there is something afoot which he cannot understand, looked at me oddly, then said:

"Viv, I'm losing hold of you. There's something about this damned ship that's going to your head. If

we were only putting in at Torquay I'd have you in the Exeter train whether you would or no."

"I almost wish you could, Harry, but you wouldn't, anyway. You're too good to me. If you were that sort, I should have been married to you long ago! Oh! I can't stay here any longer, I'm going exploring."

The magic of the hour that followed! In the stoke-hold, where the air seemed to crackle with heat, I tried my hand at stoking, Harry standing silently in the cool wind from an air-shaft. It was heavy work handling the great iron slices and rakes, and I soon relinquished them to watch the stoker tend the fires. As he opened a furnace door a subdued roar arose, and the bed of pulsing flames lay straining away from us, almost level in the draught; he flung a shovel of coal, and, with a roar that filled the ears, the fire pounced on it, and, like a hungry beast, licked it up. The burnished light flickered over the stoker's shining face and white, knotted arms, and under the opening of his shirt a line of blue shadow lay softly on his glistening chest. I climbed up the greasy iron ladder in silence, but as we made our way to the engine-room I turned to Harry.

"Wasn't it gorgeous!" I exclaimed.

"What is there about these things that appeals to you so?" asked Harry plaintively.

"I don't know. Oh, the way things look and feel! I'd go anywhere to see how a thing looked, or do anything to know how it felt."

"I wish to Heaven you'd marry me to see how it felt."

"Harry, if you're strenuous again while I'm on this platform of iron bars, I shall fall into the engines, and then all will be over between us."

Ship-Magic

The engine-room was clamorous with creatures of steel that leapt out only to check and draw back swiftly, as though held in leash: here and there, a shimmer lay on sleek dark metal: the blotches and bands of shadow pulsated in the unsteady light from the oil-lamps, only the eccentrics—those old maids of the mechanical world—kept calm and sedate, as they slowly rubbed their hands together, round and round. The engineer wiped a shelf clean with cotton waste, and, spreading a copy of *Tit-Bits* on it, invited me to sit down.

"How many knots are we making?" I asked him.

"About nine, miss."

"Only nine? The telegraph's at full speed!"

"Yes, miss, that's just the cap'en. These engines, they'm too powerful for the ship. If I was to put 'en at top speed they'd tear the heart out o' her, but get the cap'en to believe it you can't. Like to see me oil the engines, miss?"

Holding my skirts close, I followed him on his round with his long-nosed can. The connecting-rods leapt fiercely up and down, up and down, seeming to snatch at the oil he dropped in as he leant over the protecting bar. Then, as they dived into the well of shadow over the crank-shaft, and he laid a quick hand on the bearings to test their warmth, he seemed to my excited fancy like some tamer among the creatures that would rend him if they dared. A ship harbours a host of fierce hidden things that would master her if they slipped from control. Making my way round the engines I found Harry leaning against the ladder with a very pale face and eyes half shut.

"Let's get out of this," he said. "I feel deadly sick, and the smell of the engines has about finished me."

The Milky Way

"Steadiest place in a ship, but we are rollin' a bit, sir," said the sympathetic engineer. "We unshipped all our cargo at Plymouth, and we'm goin' up channel as light as a cork; bound to roll, sir!"

In the fresh air Harry turned to me with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "If you'll excuse me, Viv," he said, "I think I'll go to my cabin. I shall hardly be an engaging object."

"Poor dear, just as you like. Is it any good sending you your supper?"

"Sheer waste of good material! Oh, Lor'!" He staggered away, and I saw him no more that night.

As I was getting ready for bed the "Humoreske" sounded softly from under my port—the piper must have stolen on to the upper deck. Resolutely I blew out my candle, and, rolling over in my berth, drew the quilt over my ears.

CHAPTER III

SALT-WATER PHILOSOPHY

ALL Wednesday a feeling that forces were gathering for an explosion beset me, and, I think, Harry also. It was not merely the leaden sky and heavy moving sea, but an oppressive sense of waiting, as though something were holding its breath. At last I sent Harry, who was still rather a wreck, to lie down, and myself went on to the bridge to take the first dog-watch with the mate, who was a little grey-bearded, thin-necked man of the name of Simpson. I perched myself on the rail and leant back against the canvas with my arm locked firmly round a stanchion. The captain, who was pacing up and down, beamed at me, and the mate sniffed and gazed mournfully ahead. He was rather a friend of mine and had taken me into his cabin to show me the portrait of his son, a youth in a tobacco factory at Bristol, who was engaged to the captain's daughter—an arrangement that promoted a nice family feeling in the ship.

"I wish *I* was a young lady," remarked the mate gloomily to the world at large. "They're nicely looked after, the young ladies are. Everyone's nice to ladies."

"Aren't you nicely looked after, Mr. Simpson?" I asked. He shook his head.

"No, miss, I am not. Here I am, in the cold and the wet——"

"But so am I. And you have thick knitted gloves on and I haven't."

"If you was to want gloves, miss, every man in the ship would be crawlen' to give 'en to you. Ah, it's a rough life for us poor sailors, wi' nobody to love us!"

He waved one arm in a declamatory way, meandering mournfully up and down, with one worsted-clad finger on the wheel. The captain grinned, and as he looked at me his eyelid flickered to his cheek.

"But see what an exciting life you have of it!" I urged. "I expect you've been all over the world."

"Pretty near," he admitted sadly. "I wasn't always huggin' the land up one week and down the next. I rate myself a Cornishman, sure 'nough, but I was born to Newfoundland, and when I was a lad I was in the fisheries. Then I went in the guano trade, and goin' from one thing to another, I've seen a fair bit. I always had a mind to. When I was a bit of a lad I got hold of an old book, full o' picturs it were, tellin' about Peru, and an old ruined city inland, with g'eat temples and a pictur' of 'en standin' up in the moonlight. I said to myself 'I'll go there ef I do live,' and so I did—so I did. . . ."

He stared dreamily ahead with his little bleared eyes for a moment, then went on:

"Yes, I got there. I went coastin' up South Ameriky in a wind-jammer, and when we touched port I left the ship and worked my way inland. Weeks it took me. And sure 'nough I got to that city and stood there in the moonlight. I tried to chip a bit off the marble to take home to my Lizzie, but it was too hard—it wouldn't come off nohow."

I sat in silence, for his words had that curiously sim-

ple, direct quality that pricks the imagination. This little scrubby man had had his soul fired by an old print and had followed his quest till he had attained the desired end —an end of no earthly advantage to him, merely "a ruined city standing up in the moonlight." And he had tried to break a bit off for his Lizzie!

The mate brought the wheel round, and seemed to come back into the present with the action.

"Are you acquainted with any Particular Baptists, miss?"

I confessed my ignorance of the sect in question.

"My mother-in-law was a Particular Baptist," said Mr. Simpson, "an' she was like the rest of 'en. They thinks that what they thinks is the only right way *to* think, and if you don't think wi' 'en, you'm all wrong. There's a good many people like that, miss."

I nodded a heartfelt agreement.

"Well, one day I was tellin' her and my Lizzie—it was when we was only coortin'—'bout flyin' fish. My mother-in-law she listened in silence, but when I was gone she says to my Lizzie: 'Lizzie, d'you b'lieve in that story o' flyin' fish? Don't b'lieve there's any such things, there's naught 'bout 'en in Scriptur'.' 'Willie do say it, mother,' says Lizzie, 'an' that's enough for me.' 'That's right, Lizzie, my maid,' I say when she told me, 'you b'lieve me and the Scriptur's and you won't go far wrong.' But get that story about flyin' fish down my mother-in-law's neck you couldn't—not wi' warm milk!"

"I've met people like that, even though they weren't Particular Baptists," said I, laughing.

"Well, miss, on my very next voyage we was fairly cuttin' through shoals of flyin' fish, and as I come off

my watch one mornin' I saw one floppin' about in the lee scuppers. 'That'll do for my mother-in-law,' says I, and I stuffed it with tarry oakum and put it in spirits. It were a fair beauty, fifteen inches 'cross the wings. When I showed it to my mother-in-law she looked at it for a minute or two and then she say, 'Well, I don't go for to call that anything. I've seen pilchards caught in Mount's Bay wi' fins very near as big as that!' There was no gettin' more out of my mother-in-law."

"One always hears mothers-in-law are a bit trying," I ventured.

"Sure 'nough. Have you ever thought o' matri-*mon*ny, miss?"

"I've sometimes *thought* of it, Mr. Simpson, but somehow, the more I *thought,* the less I liked the idea. I used to think I shouldn't mind marrying a sailor, because they're away for such years at a time, and then they come home and think you're just perfect, and have to leave again before they find you aren't. But there are so many drawbacks to a sailor——"

"A sailor," declared the mate sentimentally, "is the best o' husbands. You can always count on him to be tender and lovin' to a wife."

"To anybody's wife?" I inquired.

"Well, miss," he replied, with a twinkle in his eye, "I will say we'm not particular!"

"How's the poor gentleman, miss?" asked the captain, with a discreet chuckle.

"Oh! he's only feeling a little run down to-day, captain. The worst is over. But I think I'll go and see how he's getting on."

I did not go at once to Harry, however, for first the

fascination of the wake claimed me, and I stayed leaning over the taffrail, with the water gurgling in the scuppers at my feet, and the steering chain dragging itself now a few inches forwards, now backwards, with little groans as of pain. As we ran past Dungeness, Mr. Nanverrow came to ask if I would care to haul up the signal flags, which I accordingly did, feeling very great and proud.

I found Harry quite himself again, and we went together to our place on the bridge, and about six o'clock we made Dover in the teeth of a north-east gale. The bo'sun, whose watch it was, enveloped himself in oil-skins, and the captain brought me his and buttoned me up in them, tying the sou'-wester under my chin with his big, fumbling fingers. I was only just equipped when the storm swept on to us, the hail rattling on my tarpaulined shoulders with a crackling like pistol fire; and soon the ice lay in drifts on the slippery bridge.

When we got under the lee of the shore an uncanny stillness prevailed as the ship shouldered her way through the heavy sea. A sky of dark slate hung over the grey-green water; Dover cliffs were pearl-coloured, with dim pencillings, crested by an undulating ribbon of green downs; and Dover town, pearl-coloured also, sat enthroned behind her rampart-like harbour from which two cream-hued funnels showed. Only the foam-pattern that slipped over the heave of the waves beside us was white—dead, startling white—and through the holes in it I saw the bubbles of the drowned surf driving down in pale-green wreaths through the deeper green of the water. A distant muttering broke the silence; then came flash after flash of brilliant rose-coloured lightning. Gradually it spread all round the

sky till we were girdled by quivering light, pure essence of rose-colour, zig-zags of it that flared out like wounds in the sky and lambent sheets of it. With every flash a deep pink glow was reflected on our shining decks and derricks, on the brasswork, on our oilskins and our wet faces, till the ship seemed afire from bows to stern. It was not only the colour effect of grey, pearl and green, with the one note of deep cream and the rose light over all, that was so exquisite, but every curve was perfect. Ripple of the downs, intricate pattern of the foam, pure lines of rigging towering against the sky, converging curves of the ship and long supple swell of the waves, with the sweep of the horizon binding all—it blended in one absolutely satisfying scheme of line. I pressed my cheek against a cold stanchion, nearly crying with joy. Harry slipped an arm round me, and his wet hand felt for mine up the capacious sleeve of the captain's oilies. We were disturbed by a seaman coming to hang out the red port-light; the copper lantern was run up the foremast, and over the lighted binnacle the bo'sun stared out, the footlight effect softening his broad face, but making his nose a blot of shadow. Through the deepening dusk the lights twinkled, and I tried to remember which was which, hesitating at first, then with more confidence as the captain paused in his tramping to confirm me.

"That's Gris-Nez over to Starboard, and that far one we can just see is Sandettie light vessel, and that's the South Goodwins. On a clear night when one can see them all, the Goodwins and Ruytingen, they're as thick as stars. Oh, Harry, it makes me memory-sick! The dozens of times Father and I crossed the Channel together!"

Salt-water Philosophy

"Viv, you know I'm not a poor man. I love the old place in Devon, but we'd travel as much as you wished."

The coast of France, like a cloud on the horizon, had stirred the wander-lust, and I suddenly nestled my head against Harry's shoulder. Of course I would say "yes"—it was on my tongue, when the notes of a pipe, plaintive now and sad, rose up in the darkness. I stood erect, startled.

"Dear, it's only someone playing a whistle. Put your little round head down again. Viv, say 'yes'—think of the years I've waited. Sweetheart, think of all the years!"

Only someone playing a whistle! It was more than that, it was a vagabond calling to his like; it was the summons to fare forth again, and work and laugh and take life as it came. Pleading wet and cold—indeed by then the spray was drenching the bridge—I descended to the deck and went to lie down in my bunk for a rest. As I lay there, the storm increased, and I felt the ship stagger and shudder at the edge of precipices down which she shot as though she could never right herself again, and showers of spray were hurled against my port and fell pattering on the strip of deck. A fog is the only thing which makes me nervous at sea, so I wedged myself in with pillows and presently fell asleep. It must have been half an hour or so later that I was awakened by something I can never adequately describe. Which was the more noticeable—the noise as of thunder crashing in the hold, or the sensation of my bunk standing up on end and flinging me out—I don't know; sound and sensation united in one stupendous effect that for a few moments bereft me of thought. Then the first

feeling that flashed into my mind was one of fulfilled expectation. "This is a collision, and I am in it!" I thought. "I've always heard one is awakened by a crash."

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST OF THE "CHOUGH"

IN the darkness (oil lamps and candles were the o means of lighting on board the *Chough*) I tr vainly to get my bearings. The floor was tilted at oddly impossible angle, and my groping hand touc strange shapes dislodged from their usual places; I w like a person who, suddenly awaking in the night, l lost all sense of direction for a moment and wond which way on the window is in relation to the bed.

"Miss Lovel!" cried the voice of Nanverrow, as shook the handle of my door. "Undo the bolt!"

"It isn't bolted!" I called back.

"Then the door's jammed. Don't be frightened, mi we'll soon stove it in."

"All right!" I replied, experiencing what I had re of in books as "a strange sinking sensation." I f two—one communicated to me through the cabin flo the other taking place round my *solar plexus* out sympathy.

"Hullo!" said a gentle voice close to my ear.

My eyes had grown accustomed to the dark, a against the paler circle of the port-hole I saw the bla ness of a head and shoulders. The long neck and er tuft of hair were unmistakable—it was my piper.

"Our steering-gear went bust," he explained, "a while we were stopped to repair it, in this blinding squ

a brig ran into us. Our bows have crashed through her old wooden sides with the force of her own impetus. Do you think you can insinuate yourself through this port-hole?"

"If I can get there," I replied, gazing up at the strangely tilted port that hung over me like a full moon.

"Please try—at once. Catch hold of my hand."

As I was swinging myself up, the bo'sun and Nanverrow, shouting to me to stand clear, drove in my door. I hung on to the piper's hand for a moment, and there occurred one of those curious flashes when time seems to stand still, and the fraction of a second is intensified into a conscious period. The pale sphere, with the piper's head haloed in it, his face only a few inches from mine; the feeling of tense muscles, the oneness, for that moment, of our two selves, seemed the only solid facts in a reeling world. Then I dropped back on to the cabin floor, and Nanverrow was fastening a lifebelt round me. With the aid of the piper, who was amazingly strong in spite of his reed-like look, and of a rope the sailors had stretched from the taffrail to the head of the companion ladder, I made my way along the drenched deck. At the door of the captain's cabin I came on Harry, who was clinging to the doorpost, his head swathed in a clumsy bandage.

"Viv! Thank Heaven!" he said. "I got thrown down and knocked silly. Just my luck not to be able to come and see after you. Are you all right?"

"Perfectly, thank you. Mr.—Piper has been most helpful. But your poor head! Does it hurt?"

"Not now. You'd better come in here."

"No, I'm going to see what's happening. You lie down again."

The Last of the "Chough"

Leaving Harry looking irresolute, we struggled on to the focus of all the disorder, where a great Shape loomed up in the darkness. The ships, quivering and close-locked, seemed like two vast animals of the deep struggling in mortal combat.

"Are we going to reverse our engines?" I asked the piper.

"No, the skipper says he can't, the damage is too serious. We're keeping locked by going slowly ahead while the boats are got out. Don't be frightened, we shall have heaps of time to take to them before the ships break apart."

There was no room in the night for fear—there was so much noise and energy. I heard the captain calling orders from his post by the telegraph, I heard the shouts of men, and, suddenly mingled with them, the thin, frantic cries of a woman. Looking up I saw, leaning over the rail of the brig, a woman with a bundle in her arms. Then the deck seemed to draw together beneath our feet, the brig lurched violently, and the woman screamed again.

"We shall go down! We're sinking!" she cried. "Here!" And she dropped the bundle straight down into my arms—I only just had time to hold them out.

The piper swept me backwards, and began to help me towards the main deck again, but I had just seemed to hear the woman call out something of which the only word I distinguished was "John." I clasped the bundle firmly between my chin and the top of my lifebelt, and the piper and I at last attained the captain's cabin, where we found Harry in the berth and a state of collapse. I laid the bundle on the table and began to unwrap the

shawl, disclosing, in the light from a match, what I shall always maintain to be the most wonderful infan in the world. For he was sleeping peacefully, a rubbe comforter between his contented lips, and an expressio of unaffected blandness on his brow. Such a child coul not be born to be drowned; such powers of aloofness an concentration were not made for nothing!

We sent up a shower of rockets, and the cabin wa filled with a sudden glare. The baby opened his eyes and, as darkness fell again, gave a little whimper. I picked him up and began to soothe him, and th whimpering faded away; and, in spite of being col and wet, and in danger of drowning, as I pressed th little body closer the most exquisite feeling I had eve known tingled through me. In the darkness the tin fingers closed over mine, and I laid my lips to the down head.

"Are you there, miss?" asked the voice of Nanver row. "Cap'en thinks it'd be best to take to the boats There's no cause for alarm, miss."

Alarm, when with that small, warm thing entirely de pendent on me I felt like a god!

Nanverrow was carrying a lantern, which he no turned on to the cabin. I shall never forget his fac when he caught sight of the baby.

"Aw, my dear life, where did you get that to?" h gasped.

"A woman on the other ship dropped him into m arms. I think his name is John."

"Dear Lord!" ejaculated Mr. Nanverrow.

"She said they would sink. Oh! do you think the will?"

"Not they, miss, wi' control o' their rudder," declare

the shameless steward. "Put on this coat of the cap'-en's, miss."

I paid no heed to this truly masculine injunction, but wrapped little John up again in his shawl, and rolled the coat round him so that it stood stiffly up like a fence over his head, admitting air, but screening him from wind and wet. Then I shook Harry by the arm.

"Pull yourself together, Harry!" I said. "We're taking to the boats."

"I'll get him along, miss. You go with the young man," said the mate, appearing in the doorway.

If there's one thing I dislike more than another it's a misplaced heroism that insists on dislocating official machinery, so, though unwillingly, I obediently let myself be borne along to where a boat had been lowered from the davits. They were perilously close to the water, as the two ships had by now broken adrift, and already the sea foamed over our buckled bows as we settled slowly by the head. The Gift of the Gods and I were lowered into the boat; the couple of seamen in her having hard work to prevent her being dashed against the side. Harry, still dazed by the blow on his head, was placed in the stern sheets beside me, then the piper and Nanverrow came over the side, followed by the mate, who took command.

How we lifted on the water! One was never at the same poise for two breaths together, and the acute angle of the *Chough,* which was rapidly foundering, added to the sense that the world had received a blow which must have sent it reeling sideways. As we were pulled away a second boat was lowered, and the remaining members of the crew, the captain last, swung themselves into her, and began to draw away from the vortex.

The Milky Way

There is something appalling about watching a ship go down; it is like seeing a human being die a violent death. As we lifted on to the crest of a big swell and through the darkness I saw the *Chough* struggling in the hollow of the sea, I felt as though I were guilty of indecency in watching, and I turned away my eyes as one does from anyone who is overcome by violent emotion. . . . When I uncovered my eyes and looked fearfully round she was gone.

If one must be shipwrecked it is as well that it should be in a waterway as crowded as the Straits of Dover. We were rescued after only half-an-hour's acute discomfort by a cargo-boat from Spain, called the *Solferino*, and we were given hot drinks, dry if oddly-shaped garments, and cosy bunks.

The Gift of the Gods, whom, in default of any other name, I called Littlejohn, came through the ordeal triumphantly, and I procured warm milk and water for him, and changed his clothes for swathings of soft flannel obtained from the medicine chest. Clad in a clean though exceedingly stony-hearted shirt and a blue jersey, I fell asleep, lying very still and quiet on my back, for cradled in the curve of my arm, round head against my shoulder, and one pink fist flung, palm upwards, beside it, lay the Gift of the Gods. I was already so used to thinking of him as Littlejohn that I continued to do so in my dreams, but as a matter of fact I had discovered that my ear could not have caught the mother's cry aright, for—he was a girl.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST OF HARRY

LITTLEJOHN was a somewhat exacting companion at night; and the result of many awakenings, during which I distractedly attempted to soothe her, resulted in my sleeping far into the morning, when I found we were lying anchored at Gravesend. After I had washed and fed her and re-attired myself in my own garments, curiously stiffened by the salt water, I betook both of us on deck. There I found Harry, himself again save for a crop of bruises, from which, indeed, we all suffered excepting Littlejohn. Both our own skipper and the chief of the *Solferino* were ashore, caught up in the whirl of telegrams that follows such an adventure as ours, but our own mate, Mr. Simpson, who was lolling at the rail, gloomily informed me that the *Solferino* had to take a load of cement on board, which would keep us in a haze of cement dust till past noon. Harry and I went astern, and leaning over the taffrail, gazed at Tilbury Docks, where the black funnels of the P. & O., the cream of an Orient and the strawberry-red of an Atlantic Transport showed from behind the low green strip of land, each liner with her great bunches of derricks up-hove like helpless out-stuck fingers.

The storm was over, and a brown-grey blight seemed to hold the world. Brown-grey mud-flats, across one of them a trench where brown-grey little men, like

nightmare insects, worked in the slime. A forest of tall chimneys with plumes of smoke, varying from black to white, trailing across a pallid sky. Grey-green river, where brown mud-clouds floated beneath the surface like gigantic sponges. Over all a haze of cement dust that puffed like smoke from every sack sent hurtling down the yellow wooden chutes into the holds of a couple of schooners moored near by.

"Harry, it's Providence," I said. "You can go ashore here and I'll go to Barbara's with Littlejohn, and she never need know about you at all."

"You haven't given me my answer yet, Viv. Yesterday, before everything happened, I could have sworn you meant 'Yes,' but this morning——"

"Harry, you know I've always told you I wasn't in love with you?"

"Yes, you've always played the straight game with me, Viv."

"Well, it wouldn't be playing the game if I were to marry you. I've tried to think it would, but it's no good. It would be taking all and giving nothing. My nearly saying 'Yes' was the result of tiredness and depression and rank cowardice."

"You'd be giving me yourself, which is all I want."

"What about love, Harry?"

"That would come. I'd make you so happy you'd have to love me."

"It's an odd thing," said I, half laughing through my tears, "that a man is always so confident he can make a woman love him and make her happy—and they're the two most difficult tasks in the world."

"Viv, can't you realise what it is to me to know you're on the stream? You haven't a farthing and you

won't use me in any way. And now all your worldly goods are lying at the bottom of the Channel. Viv, let me help you."

"I can't, Harry. And I've raked up some pluck again, and a job of sorts will follow. And I shall be with Barbara while I look round, so don't have the 'alone in London' idea. Besides, I'm not alone, I have Littlejohn!"

Harry groaned.

"To saddle yourself with a baby! It only needed that! I hope to heaven his fool of a mother will claim him."

"He's a she, after all," I said, "but I hope she will, for her sake. When I woke and saw Littlejohn's pink face near mine, and thought that she might be where she could never hold it to hers again—Oh, Harry! I felt awful for her. And Nanverrow told me when he called me that there's news of a sailing ship ashore near Margate. We've set all the telegraph wires hopping with messages to find out. And—if it's the worst—well, as far as I'm concerned, it's not a bad bargain to lose a box of old clothes and find a real live baby. So you needn't worry, anyway. And, besides, people are always nice to me."

"Viv, dear, you're far too pretty to knock about alone."

"Pouf! Me pretty, with my farthing face!"

"You look such a child, Viv. It's your way of wearing your hair in those plait things round your head, and your big grey eyes and little throat. . . . It was your throat I first fell in love with, Viv, when I met you and your father in that weird place in Sicily."

"My throat was very unromantically sore when I had

'flu.' And I've never found my big eyes in my way, you know!"

"Viv, make it 'yes'?"

"Harry, I'm awfully sorry, and I hate to say it, but it must be 'no.'"

He was silent for a minute, and I looked at Tilbury through a watery film, the different-hued funnels mixed up together like coloured candles melting. Then Harry said:

"I'll clear off, Viv. Write to me from the Vining woman's. Promise?"

"Yes, I promise. Br-rr-r! this cement dust! It'll get into Littlejohn's eyes. I'll go to my cabin."

At my door I laid the Gift of the Gods in the bunk and held out both hands, and Harry drew me towards him.

"Viv, won't you let me? You never have——"

"I've never let anyone—Oh, Harry, I'm a mean, ungenerous pig, but I can't!"

"All right. I didn't mean to bother you. And you're not a pig. But, Viv—if ever you change your mind—if you ever feel you could bear to—to—you'll promise to let me know? I sha'n't have changed, you know."

"Dear Harry, the last man who said that to me has just married a widow with two grown-up daughters!"

"But I mean it—I swear I do!"

"I'll promise if it'll please you, but I sha'n't change my mind, Harry. I don't know quite what brought me so near it, but I know that nothing will again. Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry!"

"There's nothing for you to be sorry about, Viv. I've had this much of you, anyway, and you've been as

divinely kind and tender and friendly as only you can be. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Harry," was all I could manage, and when he was being rowed ashore, looking very forlorn and big in the stern of the little boat, I lay in my bunk beside Littlejohn and cried till my nose went pink. I knew that what I had told Harry was true—the mood of utter weakness had brought me so near to the edge of the precipice that the one look over would prevent me ever drifting so close again. And short as was the time Littlejohn had been with me, she had effected a great deal. For I knew it was not so much the influence of the *Chough*—that, too, had been strong—not even so much the stirring sense of adventure reawakened by the shipwreck, which had kept me from saying "Yes" to Harry, as the influence of Littlejohn. When I held her to me I knew, beyond the possibility of doubt, that never to Harry would I give a Littlejohn of my own. The "not impossible" he, if he existed at all, was still in the future. And if he did not—there are always Little Johns o' Dreams.

As I sat by the sleeping baby and thought of all this, the many little lures of shipboard began to prick my abstraction—the clanking of chains, the cheery whistling of the sailors, the many indescribable sounds of ship-life. Putting on my battered old leather sombrero to hide the havoc the tears had wrought, I gave myself a shake—mental and physical—and went on deck.

CHAPTER VI

LONDON RIVER

ONCE on deck I found that the loading had begun, and from each sack of cement that careered down into the hold came a cloud of white dust, and, glad that Littlejohn slumbered in her bunk, I went and sat up in the stern. There was plenty to watch on board and off; pompous little tugs, low-lying barges, weary and worn-looking iron merchantmen, and odoriferous little refuse steamers, derisively dubbed "beef-tea boats" or "cemetery boats" by the sailors; all these kept me interested and amused. Presently a tug flying the blue and white mission flag came alongside of us, and gazing down into it I saw a fat little cleric and an attendant sailor getting out a rope ladder. On catching sight of me the little cleric took off his hat, remarking to his helpmate:

"Some ladies' papers, if you please, James. Those *Madames* and the *English Churchwoman*."

I looked wildly round for help, and made the terrifying discovery that the ship was seemingly deserted. The cement loading had just finished, and the men had apparently packed themselves into the hold with the sacks; the *Solferino* might have been a ship of the dead. Just as I was inveighing against the cowardice of the other sex, the mate of the *Chough* appeared to my rescue, and at the same moment the little cleric, by a superhuman

effort, manœuvred his leg over the rail. He advanced nervously towards Mr. Simpson.

"Is the captain aboard?" he asked.

"Cap'en's ashore, so's the mate," quoth Mr. Simpson. "I'm the mate o' a much tidier ship than this, but she's lyin' in another harbour."

The little cleric advanced on the reluctant son of Simp and wrung his hand.

"And how are you, my friend?" he asked.

The mate drew up his scrubby little person before replying with ineffable solemnity:

"'An'some in person, sir, though poor in pocket!"

The sky-pilot laughed the laugh of propitiation, and on hearing that we came from Cornwall, ventured a remark to the effect that all Cornishmen were fine men.

"As to th' men," said Mr. Simpson, still speaking in a "company drawl," "they'm nothin' out o' th' way—men's men. But our Cornish women, they'm the rarest in th' world."

"Good-looking, are they?" asked the sky-pilot.

"Can you need to ask me that?" demanded the mate reproachfully, with a lofty wave of the hand towards me, "when you can set eyes on the young lady there?"

The poor little cleric blushed nervously and began something to the effect that "of course if the young lady were the standard of beauty, it certainly was very high," when I took pity on him and strolled away to the fo'c'sle, where I commandeered the bo'sun and the chief engineer and made them come and talk to the gratified sky-pilot. He was a well-meaning, guileless soul, and the men treated him respectfully, but the shyness on both sides was embarrassing, and we were all glad when the mission tug panted off on another

errand, and left us to the illustrated papers—and I may mention in passing that *Madame* was read with great interest before the mast, especially the advertisements.

We were now waiting for the pilot who was to see us up London River, and I went into the fo'c'sle head and sat on the capstan-engine till two seamen came to wind in the anchor, and then I watched the second engineer oil the slewing-gear of the crane, which he said was "chirpin' like a bloomin' canary bird."

"Or like my whistle. Didn't you like it, that you've hidden yourself these two days?"

I wheeled round to see the piper standing behind me; a haggard boy he looked by daylight, unmistakably a gentleman through all his shabbiness. Evidently he had not detected that it was I who coaxed my little Nanverrow into giving him regular meals, only charging me the actual cost of them. I smiled at him in my relief, and then saw he was brandishing a telegram.

"Man is an egotistical creature," he said. "I want congratulations."

"You have mine. Is it permitted to ask what on?"

"Oh! I don't suppose you'll call it much, but I happen to be on my uppers. I'm a strolling player, and lately it's been nothing but strolling. This is from an old boss of mine, Haggett, who runs a travelling theatre, and he offers me 'gentlemen lead,' which means I may be called upon to play Hamlet one night, Charles Peace the next, and what's-his-name in 'The Murder in the Red Barn' the night after. But the prospect of anything to do at all excites me."

"I do congratulate you," I said. "I only wish I could have a stroke of luck like it!"

"You! What on earth d'you mean?"

Taking two sixpences out of my purse, I shook it upside down.

"That's what I mean. These will tip Nanverrow, and then I'm cleared out."

"Good heavens! Who would have guessed it?" His good-looking, boyish face was very grave. "Have you anywhere to go when you get to town?"

I told him about Barbara, and he nodded. Then: "Look here," he said, "if you can't get anything else to do, would you like me to tackle Haggett? It's a beastly life, going round in caravans, and it's no place for you, but when one hasn't a sou—I know what that means. And Mrs. Haggett's careful of the girls."

"D'you think I should be good enough? Of course, I've often acted, but only in amateur things——"

"Heavens! You should see Haggett's damsels! Not an 'h' to their names, raw red hands, and waists up under their armpits!"

"It will be very kind of you, if I can't get anything else. I shall be very glad. It would keep me going for some time, anyway!"

"That's settled then!" he cried gaily. "Shall we swear eternal friendship?"

"Certainly—how long for?"

"Oh, till Policeman Providence moves us on in opposite directions. We will swear by my whistle."

"My name's Vivien Lovel."

"And mine's Peter Whymperis—Peter Tresillian Whymperis. Humorous of it really to be Peter, isn't it?"

"It sounds too perfect to be possible. Does the 'Tresillian' mean you're a Cornishman? I'm Cornish, of course."

"So am I, on my mother's side, which I hold to be the more important. See, there's the pilot coming, and up goes the red-and-white pilot flag."

The pilot, a crimson-faced pompous individual, was rowed alongside and a ladder flung out. Mr. Simpson leant against the bulwarks, with his hands in his pockets, and watched the proceedings cynically.

"Never mind helping the pilot, lads," he observed, pipe in mouth, to the men steadying the boat; "he can swim aboard, he can!"

"You learn to keep a civil tongue in your head, my man!" snapped the pilot, growing redder than ever.

"Now we're properly introduced, we can watch the world go by together, as we go up the river," said I to my piper. "Come on to the bridge with me. The captain won't mind a bit, he's a great friend of mine."

We were rather a crowd on the bridge, what with the man at the wheel, the pilot, the captain and ourselves, but except for the superior airs of the pilot, we were all very friendly disposed. When the pilot rapped out his orders, the *Solferino's* captain, who was a thin, dark, sardonic-looking individual, would repeat them with an exquisite mimicry of tone, winking the while at me.

"Ease 'er dahn a trifle!" snapped the pilot.

"Ease 'er dahn a trifle! Right, sir!" repeated the captain, working the telegraph obediently.

Past the factories and wharves and the serried ranks of gaunt black coal-cranes; past the outward-bound ships, some with red-turbaned, blue-clad Lascars standing on their decks; past the old-world river-ports, with little Georgian houses going down into the water; past all the starkness and bustle and magic of the pageant of

London River we went; and the piper and I laugh and argued, as though we had not a care in the wo Once he looked at me with a whimsical flaunt of tawny brows, saying:

"It's good to be young, isn't it? Lord, how out it other people are!"

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three. And you, Mademoiselle Sa Souci?"

"Twenty-one; which means I'm ten years older t you, because I'm a girl. Look! d'you see that letterin 'Old Rat Wharf'? I'm longing to see Barbara ag If she asks if there were a stewardess on board, I s say, 'Oh! a charming person called Nan Verrow!' I don't see Barbara——"

And I craned over the rail, gazing anxiously at wharf. Barbara's inordinately tall figure and shock yellow hair were certainly not gracing either the wh or the narrow lane leading away from it.

I collected my things while the captain and pilot w going through the customary courtesies of whiskies soda in the saloon, and then all those of the *Choug* company, who had come so far in the *Solferino,* ass bled at the quay plank to see me off. They were d creatures; all of them Cornishmen, except one of stokers, a mere lad, known as "Irish Jack," and t all had one thing in common—a thing which experie has told me is inherent in their sex—not a man on t ship but had told me of his personal affairs. I heard of the illness of the captain's wife, and the clev ness of his daughter; of the mate's courtship, of I Jack's girl, who had consumption, and of many ot things beside, which all tended to foster in me that p

found and true piece of feminine philosophy, "Men are kittle cattle."

There was no news of any claimant to Littlejohn, so I took matters into my own hands, and leaving my name and Barbara's address with the captain, I was rowed ashore, Peter opposite me and Littlejohn, now my sole possession, on my lap.

"I expect Barbara's besieging Lloyds'," I suggested.

"I expect so," said the piper, "but I don't like to leave you till I know, so we'll go and look her up together—that is, if you don't mind."

We walked through the Minories and then took a motor-bus to Chelsea, the piper having a shilling concealed about his person. My heart beat with apprehension as we mounted the stone stairs to Barbara's flat in Beaufort Street, and I pressed the bell with a tremulous finger. After ringing many times I went in search of the hall porter, and learned from him that Miss Vining was abroad, "doing a rest-cure," and that her letters were not being forwarded. I thanked the man, and the piper and I walked on to the Embankment in silence. Into the gardens he took me and we sat down on a bench and I gazed blankly at Carlyle's unresponsive back. The high hopes to which the sea life had strung me were rudely broken—was it for this I had refused Harry? I asked myself the question sternly, but merely because I felt it the right and practical thing to ask. As a plain matter of truth, I was very little cast down—not for nothing does the wander-lust grip one; and the light-hearted philosophy of salt water is born of something too deep to be easily mastered. My mind was a blank for the time being, but it was quite a bright little blank.

London River

"Miss Lovel," said the piper.

"Yes?"

"I have nothing in the ring or watch line left. Have you?"

I held out my little gold half-hunter.

"I have this. It was a present from Father."

"Do you mind pawning it?" His voice was very gentle. "You can soon get it back, you know. I only wish there were anything of mine, but all that went long ago, and I haven't enough money left to take us to Haggett's, I'm afraid. He's out Uxbridge way, you know, and anyway you'll want a little to go on with. If you don't mind doing that, then we'll go to Haggett's together. He'll be just hopping mad to have you as soon as he sees you. I shall dun both of you for a commission!"

"Peter Piper, it's most awfully kind, but how can I be such a bother to you? And, if one looks at it as a man of the world, Littlejohn makes another mouth to feed."

"Oh, if that's all—will you come on this adventure with me, princess? I'm a shabby knight, but, to paraphrase the poet, 'a poor thing, but your own'!"

"Yes, I'll come!"

Peter Whymperis took off his hat and we shook hands solemnly. Then we bowed to Carlyle, and together passed out of the garden and set off on our pilgrimage to the pawnshop.

CHAPTER VII

HAGGETT'S

LATE in the evening we arrived at Uxbridge, having careered there on the top of a screaming tram, and a few minutes' walk took us to the big disused timber-yard, where the theatre—a great barn of an affair, made of what in my youth I had called "congregated" iron —with "The Imperial" painted in big white letters across it, had been set up. Behind lay what had once been a field, and here several caravans, their shafts prone and empty, stood about in the evening light. So much I saw almost without realising it, for I was tired out by now, and Littlejohn seemed to grow heavier and heavier upon my arms. I sat down on the lowest plank of a pile of rotting timber, and leaning my head back, shut my eyes.

"Mr. Whymperis," said I, with the firmness of despair, "you must arrange everything. If they'll have me they will, and if they won't they won't, and anyway, I can't walk or talk any more." And I hunched the long-suffering Littlejohn up against me and stayed still. In a few moments more I was asleep.

When the piper came back, attended by an enormously fat elderly woman and a dark lean young one, to wake me up, I was past taking an interest in anything beyond seeing Littlejohn fed and put to bed and following her there myself. I was vaguely conscious of a queer,

twisted little person who was neither like a boy nor a girl but more in the nature of some changeling creature, who appeared from nowhere, and, taking Littlejohn from me, tended her with amazing deftness, and then I climbed into a high bunk in one of the caravans and knew nothing more till I awoke some time next morning, feeling rather stiff and very hungry. For a few moments I lay still, staring out of the open caravan door at the timber and a ragged thorn tree against it, at one corner of the tin barn, all bathed in the bright light made of the oblong opening of the doorway by the comparative darkness of the caravan's interior. I was quite alone, but from without came a low hissing sound like that made by grooms when they are rubbing down horses. I slipped out of my bunk, and saw I was wearing a coarse striped flannelette nightgown, so, putting my own coat on over it, I peeped out.

Seated on the bottom step of the caravan was the changeling creature I dimly remembered from the night before—so dimly, that had I never seen it again, I should have thought the whole thing a dream. Apparently, it was a girl as two pallid and scrawny plaits, stiff as tiny wands, stuck out from her head, which was bent low over Littlejohn, who lay placid and happy across this strange nurse's lap. The Changeling was supporting Littlejohn with one hand under her shoulders while with a sad-looking little brush she smoothed the infant's downy locks, that were more like fur than hair. The hissing noise proceeded from the lips of the Changeling who, I afterwards learned, acted as groom to the caravan horses, a position she combined with that of contortionist, in which *rôle* she appeared in the knockabouts after the plays. When she heard me behind her she

started up nervously, and turning, raised two mild and prominent blue eyes, and for a moment I stood looking down into them.

"Good morning," said I, smiling and nodding at her. She stood still a moment, as though mistrustful, then an uncertain smile plucked at her little wedge-shaped face.

"Good morning," she answered, in a thick voice as though her tongue were too big for her mouth, as indeed it was. I sat down on the top step and beckoned her to give me Littlejohn, whose attire I examined, finding it had been put on with good intentions but what seemed misplaced ingenuity. The Changeling's eyes followed all the movements of my fingers intently. She was plainly of an anxiously good heart, yet I had to be firm with myself or I could not have borne her presence. For that she was "queer" there was no denying, and even physical deformity does not make me feel as sick as mental deformity. Of course we are all "mentally wanting." That is a different thing. My brain has more "blind alleys" than most people's. If I am asked if I am mathematical, I reply that I can't add two and two, and am then crushed by the bewildering remark that mathematics have nothing to do with arithmetic. But the Changeling was incapable of any mental outlook at all, and I had still to learn how far more important is an instinctive and clear spiritual outlook. Yet I caught a glimpse of something as I finished with Littlejohn's garments, for she glanced up at me again, this time with a gleaming smile, and I felt a queer liking in the midst of my repulsion. I never quite fathomed her position at Haggett's, nor who she really was, beyond the fact that everyone treated her with a half-kindly,

half-callous tolerance, expecting her to do most of the dirty work and to get nothing for it beyond her living and an occasional penny or so as a treat, this last when Mr. Haggett was in a generous mood. However slow her brain, her body was the most marvellously nimble I have ever seen—she might have been advertised as a boneless wonder; but, as was generally the case with good material at Haggett's, her performances were thought nothing of, and, of course, she was only useful in the short variety shows that were sometimes turned on after the piece of the evening had been played. She was certainly half-witted, but I think even more it was that her wits were not quite in focus with the accepted points of view of more worldly wits—I know I never worried over Littlejohn when Emily, as the Changeling was called, had her in charge, even when the clouded wits were more out of focus than usual. Sometimes for days together the girl would be as good a companion as a little dog, and very like one—docile, affectionate, eager; sometimes the curious withdrawn fit was on her, and though she kept by Littlejohn as usual, it was silently, with her knees drawn up to her chin and her milky-blue eyes half closed. The oddest thing I ever saw her do she did one Saturday morning when a new penny had fallen her way. I was in the post office when she came in, penny in hand, and pushed it across to the girl behind the counter.

"Penny stamp," she muttered in her thickest voice. When it was given her she took it up, licked it, stuck it carefully on to the counter and walked out. There was something inexpressibly ludicrous about the action, and, startled as I was, I had to laugh. My shrinking from the poor Changeling was a thing of the past by then, and

she, on her side, must (so Peter affirmed) have found some oddly-focussed point of view in me kindred to her own; for she lavished on me a devotion I was only too conscious, remembering how I had avoided her in disgust, of not deserving.

On this first morning at Haggett's I was glad to escape her by taking Littlejohn into the caravan and shutting the door, while I made my toilette with much labour and a little cold water. When I again emerged Peter was crouching on the ground outside, frying some bacon over an oil stove.

"Hullo, there you are!" he said. "This is for your breakfast. D'you like it crisp or sobbled?"

"Crisp, please. How kind of you, though! Well?"

"Well, it's all settled. That is, if you agree. Do you like your bread fair-complected or brunette? I have both kinds here."

"Whichever's crustiest. D'you know who's fed Littlejohn and with what?"

"I saw Emily, the half-witted kid, dandling her—is that the right word?—dandling her in front of Jinny, your van mate, who with a bad grace but—to my ignorant eye—much *savoir faire,* was inducing her to imbibe milk out of a real baby's bottle. Jinny is our brunette, and plays tragedy in consequence. Our blonde, who is fat, forty, and fairer than nature made her, does the other thing."

"And I, who'm neither one nor the other, but plain mouse as to the hair, and straight at that, what shall I play, d'you suppose?"

"Lead, I expect, when the Haggetts have had a good look at you, in which case you must prepare for ructions in the camp."

Haggett's

I sat cross-legged, eating bread and bacon hungrily, and drinking a dark fluid which the piper assured me was coffee and which had the merit of being hot, and he rambled discursively on.

"You'd better come and get your interview with Pa and Ma over as soon as you've finished breakfast," he advised. "I've told them all the main facts, I think. They'd seen about the wreck in the papers; and the advertisement about Littlejohn, description and all. I think Mrs. H. wouldn't be sorry if the fond mother appeared to claim her offspring, but with many sniffs she says she doesn't think it likely. Now, if you feel braced to meet the world, come along."

I went along, accordingly, to the smartest looking of the caravans, which boasted new red paint and much gilding, and there I found Mr. and Mrs. Haggett awaiting me. As far as externals went, Mrs. Haggett was a circular lady, upholstered in black alpaca. She had a complicated system of chins, of which the little top one seemed to button the others down. Her husband was a wide-jowled man with bloodshot eyes and pendulous cheeks; a ponderous bully of a man, with a deceptive stolidity of speech. As I grew to know the couple better I came to the conclusion that never were two people more admirably suited to each other; cold, calculating, relentless, and as unimpressible as iron. It was true, what Peter had told me, that Mrs. Haggett "looked after the girls," but it was for the sake of business. It would not have paid the Haggetts for their company to get drunk or gad about, and a strict though unostentatious watch was kept. Mrs. Haggett had a violent temper, but her husband could master her, and did—coldly, heavily, as he did everything. I have known times when

the roughs at the back of the hall started cat-calling, and Haggett just came to the footlights, his bushy brows bristling with a passion that had a curious quality of ice in it.

"Not another sound, you at the back," he would roar, menacing with his fist, "or I'll come round and fight the first man who opens his mouth!" And so he would have, and they knew it, and were silenced.

On this, my first interview with him, he was eminently businesslike, as was his wife, and I was formally enrolled as a member of the company. I was told I must present myself for rehearsal that afternoon and be prepared to play a part that night, and on this I was dismissed, to make the acquaintance of my fellow-mummers if I felt inclined.

I discovered that they consisted of the Blonde, an over-blown woman with a face too dark for her hair, and her husband, Augustus Devere, the tragedy lead, who both lived in rooms; of Jinnie—a handsome, haggard creature with a wild eye; of Bert Mirrit, who shared the third caravan with Peter and had been a draper's assistant; and of a few colourless "supers" who never seemed to laugh. Those of us who lived in rooms were paid a pound a week each for the women, and one pound ten for the men, while married couples attained thirty-five shillings between them. We caravanners only had fifteen shillings each. And how we worked! A different play each night and some fancy turns as well. It is true we all forgot our parts occasionally, and were prompted in a husky whisper by Mrs. Haggett from her pay-desk half-way down the theatre.

Bert Mirrit, a tall, hectic creature, with a profile like a biscuit that has had bites taken out of it, fancied

himself greatly as an actor: we used to call him "the Elocutionist." His idea of delivery was to add "er" on to all his words. He played the temperance reformer to my Gervaise in a garbled translation of Zola's "L'Assommoir"; and just as I was raising the glass of wine to my lips he would appear in the wings, finger upraised, and say solemnly: "Gervaise-er! Do-er not-er drink-er that-er!" As Charles Peace, most transparently disguised in the midst of detectives, he was a gem. "Ha, ha!" he would confide to the audience, while the minions of the law tried to look as though they didn't hear, "they little know-er that-er Chawley Peace-er is here-er!" He was rather a trial on the whole, for his morbidly active literary sense was for ever plunging him into situations from which we had to rescue him, and it was somewhat of a satisfaction to see him hanged in "Maria Martin, or the Murder in the Red Barn." By an ingenious contrivance his face would go purple and his tongue loll out, to the wild delight of the audience.

Amongst all the people who went to make up "Haggett's Imperial Travelling Theatre" there were only three people for whom it was possible for me to feel affection—Littlejohn, the Changeling and Peter Whymperis, and of those three only with the last was any real companionship possible. On looking back, it seems wonderful to me that I stayed there as long as I did; but after that first performance, when I had, on one rehearsal, to play "Trilby" (wearing salmon pink silk stockings, the nearest approach to bare feet the delicate susceptibilities of the Haggetts permitted), it all seemed to me rather fun, and I said good-night to Peter gaily enough at my caravan steps.

The Milky Way

"It's entirely owing to you that Littlejohn and I are able to be earning our livings at the present moment," I said gratefully. "If it weren't for you we should be sleeping on the Embankment. You are good, Peter Piper. I feel you're quite an uncle to Littlejohn."

"And what is your position as regards that interesting infant?" asked Peter.

"I'm a parent to her."

"Um!" said Peter. "What relation does that make you to me?"

I laughed, and pulled the caravan door towards me, but opened it again to stick out my head and say, simperingly:

"Oh, Mr. Whymperis, let me—let me—be a sister to you!"

"Oh, Miss Lovel," whispered Peter, with an answering simper, through the darkness, "this—this is *so* sudden!"

CHAPTER VIII

SOME TALK AND A NEW TOY

WITH June we moved further in towards London, and encamped on a piece of waste land on the outskirts of Hanwell—a locality that afforded Peter Whymperis a grim amusement. Peter's humour had been growing rather bitter of late, especially since we had left the comparatively countrified Uxbridge. We were great friends, he and I, and on Sunday evenings, when rehearsal was over, he, the Changeling, Littlejohn and I, used to take the tram to Hillingdon or all the way to Uxbridge, and then walk right out into the country and try to pretend we lived there. The big elm tree in front of the church at Hillingdon always seems to me an epitome of everything English—I know nothing so suggestive of a particular atmosphere as an elm tree. I remember one evening, in the Quartier Latin, two great friends of mine, Jo Nash and Chloe Callendar, were both busy cutting wood blocks. I, idly watching the progress of Jo's block from upside down, said: "Oh, is that an elm tree you're doing?" "No, it's a yew," replied Jo, hacking away busily. "How funny!" I exclaimed. "From upside down it looked so like an elm that I saw a dusty white road!" And both Jo and Chloe quite understood what I meant. In spite of the trams that went reeling past the Hillingdon elm, it yet suggested dusty white roads, specked with crawling wag-

gons and girt by hedgerows: and, strengthening the impression, from behind showed the church—for next to an elm in potency of creating atmosphere is the tower of an English village church.

Ordinarily, when on these expeditions, we took bread and butter with us and drank trustingly from any stray stream (saving for Littlejohn who, of course, came attended by her bottle), but sometimes we were reckless and had tea at the inn, a real country tea, with mustard-and-cress sandwiches. During our quiet strolls over fields, or when we lay by canal banks and watched the swallows darting over the water like flashes of blue fire, Peter told me all he knew about himself, while I learned as well a great deal of which he was ignorant.

One Sunday evening we lay, chins propped on hands, at the grassy edge of a canal; a little way off the Changeling and Littlejohn were bandying inarticulate gurglings, while the former twisted some bindweed into a necklace for the latter, who, for her part, seemed busily if ineffectively poking a fat, soft finger earthwards as though in search of worms; on the still air came the sound of church bells, giving us the luxurious feeling which comes of completely disregarding their appeal. I knew already the outward facts of Peter's life—that he was an orphan and that he was by way of being a writer, but this evening I began to know the real Peter. Hitherto he had been merely the good comrade, now I began dimly to perceive that quality in him for which I have never been able to find a name. It was not exactly spirituality—certainly not the spirituality whose only outlet is religion—the quality, whatever it was, pervaded the whole world for Peter. Where I

would placidly accept the externals of a thing, Peter would grasp at its meaning; I think in his way of looking at life he was something of a futurist, who, he always insisted, had hold of the wrong end of the right stick.

Peter shared the particular ambition of most embryo authors—he yearned to write a play. He had also every intention of doing so. He was in no hurry about it, but placed it quite tranquilly and surely in the future, and meanwhile he wrote anything and everything by way of practice. He had just finished reading me his latest production, a sketch called "Pan in the Suburbs" —a delicate, whimsical trifle—and I withdrew my vaguely watchful eyes from Littlejohn to say:

"Oh, Peter, I wish you'd write a whole book so that I could illustrate it! And then, perhaps, we could get it published."

"So do I! It would be jolly. We will, too."

"Only Haggett's doesn't seem to leave one the time or the energy to do anything that needs sustained effort. I'm always meaning to buy a few paints and do a panel of those lock-gates and the way the shadow comes across them in the later afternoon, but I never shall."

"That's true! I suppose we must wait till we're clear of Haggett's. And sometimes I feel I won't mind how soon that is."

His tone was very tired as well as gloomy, and I laid my hand over his with a little shake of encouragement. I was very anxious about Peter. Myself, I was well enough, for my constitution of wire and elastic rebounded from anything, but Peter was a person of moods, and lately this mood of utter depression had been the dominant one. Where was my piping Faun now? Gloom-ridden he seemed, with a haunted look

in his eyes and a rather piteous and bitter smile at his mouth. Haggett's was no place for a temperament like this, a thing of fine edges and deep-bitten impressions, and in my heart I too echoed the wish that he might soon win clear. A little silence fell between us, which Peter was the first to break.

"Princess," he said, "d'you know what it is for a black mood to take you by the throat and hold you for days, to poison your food and spoil your sleep and kill the daylight?"

"I get fits of down-in-the-depths-ness, but on the whole I think life's so funny one can't help laughing with it."

"Oh, my little philosopher of mirth, life's so damnable that the only thing to do is to laugh—at it. Our starting points are different, but the effect arrived at's the same. Or would be, if I could only shake off this fit of the blues. The other day I went down to Hammersmith on business for Haggett. It was that dark day, d'you remember? The sky was leaden, without a cloud to break the grey roof of it, the air itself seemed brown and dead. D'you know when a depression that's like a sense of overwhelming disaster is over everything? It was there that day. Ugly, pinched-looking people hurried past me on the pavement, and I wanted to stop them and warn them of something dreadful—of some awful thing they were going towards that only I knew of, and I didn't know what it was——"

"Was it one of those days on which all the people one meets are uglier than each other?" I asked. "Because if so, I can sympathise. Sometimes, for days together, it seems to me the people in the streets and 'buses and things are so extraordinarily ugly they're like carica-

tures of themselves! I think it largely depends on the state of one's own head inside. If one's in a good mood, one sees how even the ugliest people look stunning, getting into a 'bus, for instance, when one is already inside it. They show as a lovely simple tone against the light, and the light itself plays along the edges of them. That's how I feel if I look at things as they appear, but I know if I start out in an idealistic mood, with the thought of a Grecian head, say, in my memory, then I see nothing but how hideous people are, because I only see them as their actual selves, without lighting, and character, and everything that goes to make appearance. D'you see what I mean?"

"Yes — you mean that when people all look hideous to you you're only seeing the facts and not the truth."

"Yes, that's it. Because, after all, truth is how a thing appears, not how a thing is."

"That's right enough," agreed Peter, "but truth depends also on the point of view. An egg, after all, is only a circle seen from a certain angle. But you see, you've only been talking of the external truths and facts. What gripped at me the other day was the feeling of something ugly behind it all. I felt people were hideous because of a hideous something behind that was working outwards. The footfalls on the pavement were like hammerings on a coffin lid—the prosaic clang of the motor-bells was the knell of something undefined—of all that's young and beautiful and hopeful, I think."

"Peter!"

"Which last is impossible as long as there's you to come back to!" he said, with his swift smile. "Even that day while I was so afraid that I could hardly sit in the tram and was certainly too afraid to get out, I

thought of coming home to you and being made to think that life wasn't so bad after all. I had to get out of the tram eventually—we all had to, all the fat women and lean, weedy men—because the road was barricaded to prevent traffic. A big store was burnt out the other day, and it was expected to fall at the least shake. Groups of people stood about on the pavement, just staring upwards. They didn't speak; the sight of the gaunt walls didn't seem to afford them any satisfaction, and only a numb interest. There they stood, surly men in clumps, occasionally lowering their heads to spit on the road before them."

"What did it look like?"

"You just saw the tall house-front with its burnt-out windows. Through the lower ones you caught glimpses of crumbled and blackened inner walls, and through the upper the sky looked wanly, like pale, blind eyes. It was all bleak and bare and unspeakably ruined."

"But you came back to me and Littlejohn, Peter. That dreadful house was nothing to do with your life really. And, talking of Littlejohn, she has got something to show her uncle. Emily, just bring baby over here, and show her uncle her new toy."

The Changeling came towards us over the grass, bearing Littlejohn with a queer, sawing movement that that remarkable child never seemed to resent. With many grins and gurglings of vast portent the Changeling laid Littlejohn across Peter's embarrassed knees and waited. I waited. So did Peter. And Littlejohn puckered up her face and opened her mouth to let out a disappointed roar.

"She thought more of your intelligence, Uncle

Peter," I said reproachfully. "Can't you see what i
is? She's doing her best to show you."

Still Peter stared—then he broke into a yell that out
did Littlejohn's, and, indeed, nipped that infant's at
tempt in the bud. Littlejohn's astonished mouth re
mained open just long enough for her uncle to point i
surprise and triumph at her first tiny achievement in th
way of a tooth.

CHAPTER IX

THE CALL TO ARMS

ON the morning of the following Thursday, I was seated on the steps of the caravan busy peeling potatoes. It was not a gay scene at which I gazed as I dug the "eyes" out of the slippery, astonishingly naked-looking vegetables. My fingers were wet and stained, and stiff with the chill wind of a fickle English June, and behind me the voice of the Brunette implored me to shut the door. I banged it to with a will, glad to cut off that audible reminder of Haggett's from my consciousness. The further end of the waste was sacred to a dealer in scrap iron, who lurked in a little shed of corrugated iron beside the dismal heap of his stock-in-trade. There were shattered drain pipes, red with flaking rust, that looked like the stalks of some giant plant of which the piled wheels with their mangled spokes and encrusted hubs seemed the skeleton blossoms, while the drift of pots and pans, in every tone of brown and orange, were the scattered seeds—a heap of Titan vegetation, petrified by the fiery lava of some distant disaster. From the high road came the scream of the electric cars and the clanging of their bells as they swung round the corner. Beside me the harsh grass whispered softly and here and there a paper bag made spasmodic efforts to get a little further in the world. There is nothing so demoralising to any landscape as a paper bag, unless it

is orange peel, and of that we had plenty, but I loved the glowing note it made as it winked from the trodden grass. A sky of pure cold blue arched behind the roof tops, blotted by gold-white clouds, with trails of grey cirrus dragged across them in places like ragged curtains; and in the strong sunshine the blocks of distant flats glared a deep tawny-red.

As I sat gazing at all this, Peter came towards me over the waste ground, carrying a string-bag bulbous with blue-papered parcels and exuberant with lettuce. Sitting down on the step below me without a word, he took off his cap and let the cool wind sift refreshingly through his hair. Then, turning his head swiftly with one of his half-shy movements that always reminded me of a young animal, he rubbed his forehead against my hand—a proceeding resented by the company's kitten, which was nestling in my lap.

"You're a stunning person to come back to, princess," he said.

"How did you get on with the shopping?"

"Oh, all right. I was quite in the fashion; all the best people round here carry a string-bag. I wonder why? String-bags have always seemed to me such limp things, with no proper self-respect. All the dear ladies, their shopping done, were scurrying home to prepare for the husband's return from 'the office.' What *is* 'the office,' princess? The husbands all go there daily; not, mark you, to *an* office, but *the* office. I imagine it some vast hall of industry, lined with desks, a husband bending over each."

"Yes, like 'Stationers' Hall,'" I remarked. "Didn't you have 'Entered at Stationers' Hall' on your pencil boxes when you were young? I did, and I always pic-

tured it a great temple with a sort of tunnel running through it, and the pencil boxes, piled on trucks, were run through this tunnel—in at one door and out at t'other. That was being 'Entered at Stationers' Hall.'"

"I once asked one of these little wives what 'the office' was," continued Peter dreamily. "She replied with strange bitterness that it was a place where he was often unaccountably detained in the evening. Rather exclusive to call it '*the* office,' but, then, in Suburbia they are exclusive; I expect they keep a 'special Providence,' whatever that may be. The suburbs are the home of mystery, not what they seem; for instance, I believe it incorrect to conclude that Parson's Green is entirely the resort of clergymen, or that Jews refuse to reside in East Ham."

"The Abbey is where we hope to go when we die, and Hammersmith is where the life models live," I murmured thoughtfully, "and Bedford Park, like the Blonde's hair, is too good to be true."

"Ah, well," said Peter, "it won't do for me to idle my time away like this. I must arise and see to that blow-lamp. Haggett wants the old paint burnt off the garden seat that the heroine always sits on. He wants it re-painted virgin white."

Something was certainly wrong with the blow-lamp—the flames roared out in a plume of yellow a foot long, but this was corrected with the aid of one of my hat pins, and the flare reduced to a hardly visible breath of blue. It was curious how, directly he turned it against the surface of the iron, the flame sprang into yellowness again, spreading out in a luminous fan, and whistling like a gas jet. Peter scraped away busily at the melting paint that fell curling to the ground, making a heap

of sticky green shavings. The smell of burning paint being rather powerful, I departed with my potatoes to cook the dinner for the Brunette, Peter, Bert Mirrit and myself, we being the only caravan-dwellers besides the Haggetts, who fared more sumptuously and apart.

That afternoon, it being early-closing day for the shops, we were giving a matinée performance of "The Bells of Chimehurst," which was described on the bills as a "rustic comedy." Peter Whymperis was generally *jeune premier,* but in "The Bells of Chimehurst" he was cast for the villain. We never were able to understand the plot of the "rustic comedy" ourselves. The church bells burst into a peal whenever anything of particular interest occurred in the life of the heroine, which seems a somewhat unusual arrangement. Haggett himself, in a check suit, a top-hat, and a fawn ulster, played the bluff old English squire, whilst poor Peter was doomed to propose to me in tartan trousers and his shirt sleeves, to the accompaniment of a merry peal from the obliging bells of Chimehurst. Comic relief was provided by the part of the village washerwoman, played by the Blonde. "The old English squire" had a flirtation with this lady over her wash-tub, and humour of an exceedingly elementary sort was obtained by the shaking out in his face of various garments not usually displayed in polite society. It was all very vulgar, very silly, and essentially moral. Virtue, in the person of the Elocutionist (returned from America in a dinner jacket and a Homburg hat), triumphed completely; and villainy, in the person of Peter, committed suicide, plaid trousers and all, to the last bright peal of those officious bells.

Any subtlety of interpretation would have been wasted on plays and audiences, but there was not even good

cloak-and-dagger acting. The women frumped about the stage in skirts that sagged at the back, talking in a sustained squeak, and the men were even more hopeless. It had been amusing enough when I first started, but by now I was sick to death of it. As we stood in the wings before our first entrance, Peter, who had been listening to the aforementioned flirtation scene with a queer smile on his face, turned to me.

"Let's do ourselves proud, princess!" he whispered. "Let's hurl ourselves into the spirit of the thing and make it as absurd as we can. I must run off the rails somehow this afternoon."

He whistled the "Humoreske" under his breath, and the memory of the days on board the *Chough* caught at me, and made the old imp of adventure raise its head. Our eyes met and we laughed gaily at each other. We were both "fey," as the Cornish saying has it, a state of things always supposed to lead to tears before nightfall. The only wonder is that we had borne the Haggett menage without going fey as long as we had, for it was a seething mass of incongruous elements, bound to explode sooner or later; only the desperate need of the various members of the company had made such an artificial state of affairs possible at all.

I gripped Peter's hand in the shadow of the wings, and I too whistled the "Humoreske" softly; prudence had fled, and it was to the lilt of Dvořák's music that I stepped on to the stage.

CHAPTER X

BEING FEY

TO use Peter's expression, we certainly "made things hum" that afternoon. He proposed, hand on heart, in the best Adelphi manner, and I refused him with an Assyrian gesture of out-flung arms and averted head. We burlesqued our actions and "gagged" freely —we were not allowed to act well, then we would at least act as badly as possible. A feeling of tension spread through the whole company; for some time now both the Blonde and the Brunette had treated me to covert unpleasantness, but to-night the hidden things lifted unabashed heads, the wires of diplomacy were stretched beyond bearing point, already they gave a discordant note, soon they would snap utterly. Partly the friction had arisen from the fact that I had always been given juvenile lead, a position formerly held by the Blonde, which accounted for her dislike; but Jinnie's glowerings puzzled me more, for, being dark, she always played heavy lead, though, owing to the smallness of the company, she was what is called "the chambermaid," *i.e.*, was cast for the small character parts, as well. Up till this afternoon I had endured the unpleasantness phlegmatically, but now, sick of the whole sordid affair, I felt reckless and cared for nothing.

Between the acts I saw Haggett looking thunderously at me; the Blonde muttered inarticulately as she

flounced past; Bert Mirrit seemed absolutely dazzled, and hung on my every movement, which caused the Brunette to whiten beneath the greasepaint, while an ominous little pulse beat in her thin cheek. It was not that the women were jealous of my influence with the audience—the puzzled shop-lads and their sweethearts were at a loss what to make of my performance, and applause was a tentative, gusty thing, that faded away as though alarmed at itself; but whether applause came or not, Peter and I were the dominant figures on the stage. The very fact that the members of the audience did not know how to take us added to the arresting quality we seemed to give off like an aroma. It was appallingly inartistic of us—the performance became a medley of jarring notes, nothing kept in key, there was no unity of atmosphere—but Peter and I enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. The audience became demoralised, the play ended amid a tornado of hisses, claps, and catcalls; and as Haggett rang down the curtain I slipped away to the dressing room.

Rather to my surprise, none of the other women came to remove their make-up, and just as I had finished changing from the bridal gown I had worn in the last act to the old silk shirt and tweed skirt of everyday life, there came a knock at the door. I opened it to find Haggett standing outside. He was removing his make-up, and the mingled vaseline and dark greasepaint made him look like a negro in the act of being melted down.

"Miss Lovel," he said (I had waged successful war against the "dear" of "the profession"), "kindly go back to the stage. Mrs. Haggett wants to speak to you."

I found the stage in semi-darkness, the footlights

having been put out and the top-lights turned low; the hall lay in deep shadow, only the first few rows of empty benches gleaming faintly. Several people stood about the stage: Mrs. Haggett, composed, but with an effect of effort, and breathing heavily through her nose; Peter, with his chin up and his hands in his pockets, and the Elocutionist, in an attitude suggestive of the Last Phase at St. Helena; while Jinnie, the Brunette, was endeavouring to console Mrs. Devere, who crouched, hysterically heaving, on the ground. Her husband, Augustus, the tragedy lead, glowered beside her, looking down on the wide back of her neck with a weary, impersonal scrutiny. Everyone stood in a pool of shadow cast by the top-lights, and as the flames blew about in the draught the shadows wavered like breathing creatures. They were the only moving things there except the convulsive shoulders of Mrs. Devere—it was a curious rigidity about everyone that struck me as I advanced, giving me that unmistakable feeling of "something" having happened.

"She or I must go!" sobbed Mrs. Devere, and the Brunette echoed her viciously.

"What is it? What's happened?" I whispered to Peter.

"I can tell you what's 'appened, Miss Lovel," said Mrs. Haggett grimly: "the ladies of this company have given me a mannifister that they don't want you to stop 'ere any longer."

"I don't quite understand," said I, while Peter gripped my hand in the shadow of the projecting wing.

"There's some people," came in strangled accents from the heap on the boards, "'oo come along and do

the la-di-da, and keep themselves *to* themselves, but aren't above snatching the bread from a 'ard-working artiste, who's always been top-dog with the public, and me a mother, too!"

With rising wrath, I turned to Mrs. Haggett.

"It is evidently no good asking Mrs. Devere to explain," said I; "perhaps you'll tell me how I've snatched bread from anyone?"

"It's no use saying anything with these people littering the place," replied Mrs. Haggett, contemptuously. "Augustus, take your wife 'ome, and tie 'er jaw up. Bert—you fetch Mr. 'Aggett to me, and Jinnie 'ad best go back to the caravan."

Everyone obeyed her, and she and Peter and I waited silently on the dim stage till Haggett appeared, looming portentously through the gloom. He took his wife's fat hand in his and stroked it gently, murmuring, "Keep calm, my little woman! don't distress yourself!" while he fixed me with his beady, dark eyes.

"Fact is, Miss Lovel," he said, "the company's jealous of you, and I don't blame 'em. You're not the sort we want here—we don't want a pretty girl, and we don't want a clever girl, and we don't want a girl who can act. For why? Becos it don't match the rest of the company. I talk straight to you, miss, because you've always played straight by me, and hit out from the shoulder when you'd a mind, and I admit you knock spots off the other women—that's just what I object to. I'd like a whole company of your sort well enough, but it can't be 'ad—so I can't 'ave all my company made to look cheap—see?"

I did see—there was sense in what he said. I was out of focus there, and made all the others seem out of

focus too. If I had been a showily pretty girl, to whom the youths of the audience would have brought round nosegays wrapped in paper, greasy from their hot hands, it would have mattered less, but I was not. Probably the audience thought me a frump, with my plain frocks and my mouse-coloured hair swathed in close plaits round my head, but all the same, I made the other women look haggard and lacking in freshness. Neither they nor I seemed in our right places, and so no definite effect was arrived at.

"You wish me to leave?" I asked Haggett.

"That is the size of it," he admitted. "Of course, as it's without notice, you'll have a week's wages. It'll cause less ill-feeling if you don't appear again, but there's no call for you to leave till to-morrow." He was a just man in his way, was Haggett.

I put away my property gowns in the dressing room, and then crossed to the caravan. Peter was waiting for me by the steps.

"Don't go in for a minute," he said, eagerly. "I must speak to you. I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry this has happened—but what will you do?"

"I don't know, haven't the vaguest idea. Why, Peter, what is the matter?" I had touched his arm, and found he was trembling violently.

"What's the matter?" he replied, setting his jaw angrily. "Can't you guess I'm dying to knock Haggett's teeth down his fat neck? The man's a criminal —to turn a girl like you off into the world with fifteen shillings!"

"I've more than that; I've saved quite three shillings lately. Oh, Peter, I'm so tired! Thank Heaven, I haven't to act again to-night. But I must make ar-

rangements about Littlejohn, and there's my packing to do—and—Peter—don't worry about me, there's a dear."

He took my hand, and suddenly bending his head, kissed it. The action, coming from the boyish Peter, who was never anything but the good comrade, touched me. So few men know how to kiss one's hand, and Peter did it perfectly. As ill luck chose, the caravan door swung noiselessly open at that moment, and the Brunette appeared on the threshold. The burnished glow of the evening sun lay over the waste land, and tinged Jinnie's face and figure with a coppery iridescence; behind her, the dimness of the caravan was faintly illuminated by a forlorn candle flame, and the result of the conflicting lights was to eliminate all shadows, and make of Jinnie an avenging fury. Without warning, she broke into speech.

"Think you're coming into my caravan, do you, you hussy? Me, as has always been an honest, respectable girl, to have to put up with the likes of you, carrying on with two men at a time, and hugging and kissing under the very door——" I heard no more, for Peter flung the cloak he was carrying round me, muffling my ears with it, but from the white-hot anger of his face, I knew she must be saying things unrepeatable. Drawn by the clamour of her voice, Haggett and the Elocutionist came hurrying from the other caravans.

"What's all this?" stormed Haggett. "I can't have this sort of thing. Jinnie, hold your tongue, this moment."

I had shaken off the cloak, and I wheeled round on him.

"You asked me to leave to-morrow, Mr. Haggett,"

I said; "I will leave now. Nothing could induce me to stay another night with a person who has said such things as Jinnie. Please tell her to come down, and I will pack my things. Then I will go."

Haggett looked intensely relieved, and Jinnie sullenly descended the steps. Peter laid his hand protestingly on my arm, but shaking him off, I went into the van and closed the door. My hands trembled as I put my few belongings together in my little bag, and when I had finished, I laid my face on its cold American cloth side, and burst into a passion of tears. I felt I could never meet Peter again, never bear the smile of fellowship in his frank eyes. That unutterable woman had smirched the one thing that had made life worth living; the friendship with someone honest and gentle, someone of fine but strong fibre, on whom I could lean, and who had often, in his turn, leant on me. My cheeks burned with shame as the few words of Jinnie's I had heard beat back and forth through my brain; it seemed impossible not to be sullied by the mere fact that such things had been said to one.

Picking up my little bag, I opened the caravan door, and saw Haggett waiting by the steps. He presented me with fifteen shillings in an envelope, and stopping me as I was about to put it in my pocket, he insisted, like the man of business that he was, on my counting it shilling by shilling. Then I handed him back half a crown.

"That's for Littlejohn's milk, Mr. Haggett, and for Emily's fare when she brings her to me," I said. "I can't take her goodness only knows where this evening, but I will send for her as soon as I can, probably tomorrow. Please let Emily have entire charge of her,

and when I send, will you make sure to hand my card with the address on it to Emily, so that she can show it to people when she wants to know the way. In fact, you'd better see that she pins it on to Littlejohn's clothes. Mind, I've always got the milk in the sealed bottles, and I trust to you to let Emily do the same."

Mr. Haggett pocketed the half-crown and nodded portentously, and I held out my hand.

"Good-bye, miss," he said, as he shook it. "I'll see that Emily's allowed to do right by the little 'un. And I'm sorry Jinnie should have spoke as she did. She'll be sorry for it presently. She knows you're as straight as they make 'em, but—well, she was jealous of you know 'oo, and 'ad 'er dander up."

Haggett and I parted without malice, and after farewells and many carefully repeated injunctions to Littlejohn and the Changeling, I went down the waste land towards the trams. By the heap of scrap iron stood Peter, in the full blaze of the evening sun, that made the rusty metal glow like fairy gold, and edged his tumbled hair with prismatic light, giving him more of the Faun look he had when I first saw him in the glow from the stoke-hold. I held out my hand and he took it.

"Good-bye, Peter Piper," I said, "and good luck! I expect we shall run up against each other some time."

"Oh, I expect so!" he agreed airily. "Till then, princess!"

The lightness of his tone and the carelessness of his whole bearing hurt me more than anything that had happened. Taking my hand away, I nodded brightly, and walked on to hide the welling tears which threatened to humiliate me. Round the other side of the scrap-

iron I came on the Elocutionist, who was holding a paper bag.

"Miss Lovel, take it—it's sandwiches. You may need them. Oh, Miss Lovel, farewell, and may you never want! If it's any comfort to you to know that my 'eart is unchangeably yours——"

"Why, Bert!" I exclaimed in amaze, "but you're walking out with Jinnie!"

"*Was* walking out," he corrected, "but 'ow could I content myself with the candle when I had seen the star? Your beams, Miss Lovel, shone into my 'eart and put 'er out."

Seeing the Elocutionist was in the grip of one of his dramatic situations, I spoke sternly.

"Listen to me, Bert. You are talking silly nonsense. You don't really care for me at all, and you do care for Jinnie. I wonder at you behaving in such an unmanly way; haven't you been paying attention to Jinnie for months?"

"What are men's laws against the sacredity of passion?" demanded the Elocutionist.

"You make me quite sick! Don't talk stuff out of penny novelettes to me; go back to Jinnie and ask her to forgive your absurd behaviour, and she will, though it's more than you deserve."

The starch was nearly gone from poor Bert by now, and he looked at me limply; but made one more effort to keep up his pose.

"Is it nothing to you that a man offers the devotion of 'is 'ole life to you?" he demanded. "I don't ask anything of you, Miss Lovel, nor ever would, except to be allowed to adore you—does it mean nothing to you that you spurn it?"

"Nothing whatever, when it belongs to someone else. Come, Bert, you're a good boy, and you've always been nice and obliging to me; now do just one last thing to please me."

"Anything, Miss Lovel. My life is at your service."

"That's just what I don't want! Promise me to go back to Jinnie and make it up. Will you?"

"Since you ask it—yes! It is but a broken 'eart I 'ave to offer 'er, but it shall be done!"

"Thank you, Bert. And thank you for the sandwiches, too!"

We shook hands, and I watched him go back across the waste land, the pride of conscious virtue in his gait, already happy in his new pose. Then I climbed on to the top of a tram, and let it take me to Hammersmith. I leant against the unsympathetic back of the tram-seat and bit my lip to keep myself from crying. Absurd as he was with his theatrical devotion, there was no denying that the Elocutionist had minded my departure more than Peter. The Changeling had clung to my arm in a frenzy when she realised I was going away without her; even Littlejohn, as though some sympathetic prescience told her of my desertion, grew red in the face with weeping—and I was confronted with the fact that apparently it was only the mentally deficient who regretted me. I felt very lonely, far lonelier than when I had landed from the *Chough* and found Barbara's flat deserted—for then I had had Peter. I am afraid I must have cried a little, for when I made my way to the District Railway Station at Hammersmith Broadway, I had to blink very hard to see where I was going. My mental vision must also have suffered from mistiness, for ar-

rived at the booking office, I took a ticket to the Temple
for no better reason than that I thought it sounded
nice name. And, after all, since I had nowhere to go
I cannot see that it mattered much where I went.

CHAPTER XI

WHERE THE 'BUS WENT

ON the Temple platform I ran into Peter, who was alighting from the next carriage.

"Steady, old girl!" he said, gripping me firmly by the elbow, "for the Lord's sake don't cry!"

"I—I'm not crying. Oh, Peter, I thought—I thought——"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Oh, Viv, you are an utter little goose!"

He picked up my bag as he spoke, and then I noticed that he was already carrying a bundle.

"Peter, you haven't left Haggett's? And it's all through me! I shall never forgive myself, never!"

"Haggett's," said Peter cheerfully, "was not so bright and beautiful that it broke my heart to leave. By the way, what a brown study you were in not to see me get into that tram. Hullo! this gentleman in uniform very kindly wishes to relieve us of our tickets; give him yours. And now——" as we emerged into the cold riverside air, "where are we going?"

"I don't know," I replied, "I haven't thought about it."

What I was thinking was that he had called me "Viv" for the first time, and I laughed a little as I realised he didn't know that he had.

"When in doubt take a 'bus," observed Peter. "The only question is, what 'bus shall we take?"

Where the 'Bus Went

"A nice, reliable 'bus, not a skittish young thing that will coquet with a lamp-post. You observe that 'buses carry their ages legibly marked upon their persons—I'm glad we don't. Fancy when we got to thirty! We won't take a very young 'bus like four or five, because it couldn't reasonably be expected to know where it was going; we'll choose a staid old thing somewhere in the sixties."

"Mightn't it be suffering from senile decay?" asked Peter anxiously.

"So it might. We'll choose the divine middle age."

We finally settled on a 'bus that had attained the age of forty-something—according to the big white label that decked its front. We handed the conductor a shilling, saying: "Two—as far as you go," and pocketed the change without counting it; because Peter said the only way to travel was to trust to Providence and a uniform. We forgot to look at the tickets and find out where we were going, so to this day the destination of that 'bus remains a mystery, and I only know that it was somewhere on the Surrey side of the river. Dusk had fallen when we alighted, and we wandered down grey little streets with growing disgust at our surroundings.

"That 'bus has played us false!" announced Peter. "I see no card advertising 'apartments for a single woman,' which is what I want to find you. You will be reduced to a temperance hotel, and wire blinds are *so* depressing!"

"Temperance hotel! This doesn't look to me the kind of locality for a temperance anything! Let's try this street, it looks quiet."

It was—it consisted of shuttered warehouses, and was cut off in its prime by the river. Peter and I looked for

a few moments at the stretch of gleaming mud between us and the brown-grey of the sluggish tide, then turned to retrace our steps. As we did so a half-open door with a notice on it caught my eye.

"Waxworks, a penny!" I read aloud. "Do let's go in!"

We pushed open the door and found ourselves in a narrow passage, made narrower still by a kitchen table and chair; evidently this was the receipt of custom and the receiver had gone to his supper. Laughing at the adventure and pretending we were going to meet bogies round the corner, we started to mount the stairs. They were frail as matchwood, and in places had given way utterly, while it was long since the banisters had seen better days. A dim, strange-smelling house it was, the pallid wall-paper hanging in clammy strips from the blotched walls; and it was with quite an exciting flutter of the heart that I led the way into the first room. A large bed stood at the far corner and in it lay a waxen woman, propped by pillows, her waist held by a smug-looking man in a blue serge suit and fair wig, who stood beside her. At the foot of the bed smirked two more waxen ladies, who displayed a lively interest in the proceedings. A label round the neck of the man of the party announced that he was "James Bates, the Canning Town poisoner," and that the women were his three wives, to whom he had administered strychnine. I clutched Peter's arm; it was all so gruesome in that darkening house.

"Shall we not go any further?" asked Peter.

"I must know the worst! Lead on!" I declared, peering over Peter's arm in mock terror as we advanced into the next room, which had a barricade some three

feet high across it. Unsuspectingly we looked over that barrier—and sick to the soul, I staggered against Peter in good earnest, burying my face on his shoulder.

There had been, a short time before, a crime known as the "Turnham Green Murder." A man had bought a grocery business from a young married couple, and to escape payment had murdered them and their baby, and buried the corpses in the garden. In the back room of this riverside house the scene of the disinterment was portrayed with revolting accuracy. There, among fragments of sacking and piled earth, showed the upturned waxen faces in which decay had been horribly imitated; there, scattered in different places, were the limbs of the child——

"It's all right, Viv! It's only wax figures, you know! Damn the brutes and their foul imaginations! Buck up, old girl; pull yourself together!"

"Take me away, Peter! Take me away!"

"We'll go this minute," he assured me, drawing me to the door. The dark had come swiftly, and the stairs disappeared into impenetrable darkness. Peter shut the door of that dreadful room behind us.

"Listen to me, Viv," he said, "the stairs aren't safe, and you must wait here while I go on and open the front door to make more light."

"Peter, I can't be left alone here! Peter!"

"I don't see what else to do, Viv."

I set my teeth hard.

"Just as you think best, Peter. But oh, don't be long!"

"I'll be as quick as I can, and I'll talk to you all the time," he promised, beginning his cautious descent. Every time a stair creaked my heart leapt in terror, but

he attained the ground floor in safety, and I heard him tumble over the table—then came a frantic rattling of the door handle.

"What's the matter?" I called.

"The proprietor's been and gone and locked the door," shouted Peter, with forced cheerfulness. "We shall have to yell." Going into the room on the ground floor, he beat heavily on the shuttered windows, and the blows re-echoed through the empty house.

"Peter! Peter-er! Come back, I can't bear it!" I cried.

"Right-o! We must lean out of the upstairs windows; these are all boarded up."

So were all the front-room windows; only in the back rooms, looking over the muddy waste of the ebbing Thames, could we open the casements. I don't know how long we shouted, turn and turn about; it seemed hours. We might as well have been in a desert. If any people did hear our cries they were evidently of that class which leaves ill alone. The moon was shining wanly into the room when we looked at each other with our hopelessness confessed in our gaze.

"Let's eat the sandwiches," said I.

As he swallowed the last crumb, Peter squared his shoulders.

"Things might be worse," he announced; "at least, there's a bed for you."

"D'you imagine I could sleep in that awful bed?" I cried.

"Why not? Don't be silly and fanciful. I'll turn the wax lady out, and you just be thankful to the gods for giving you a nice warm bed with a pillow and a counterpane on it."

oo

Where the 'Bus Went

Peter was as good as his word, and pulling the wax lady ruthlessly out of bed, he bundled her and her fellows into the Chamber of Horrors, and shut the door on them.

"There!" he said cheerfully, "they'll be company for each other." He shook up the pillows as he spoke.

"If you imagine," said I, "that I'm going to have the bed *and* the pillows *and* the counterpane, you're very much mistaken. You jolly well take one pillow and the counterpane, or I won't go to bed at all."

"Rot!" said Peter.

"I mean what I say. Those are my terms; take 'em or leave 'em. But I am dead tired and longing to go to bed, and unless you'll agree to my terms I can't, so it'll really be very selfish of you if you refuse."

We had a healthy quarrel, but I won, and Peter retired to his little room, the only other empty back room, with the quilt and one pillow; while I disposed myself with my coat over me, and thought how fortunate and appropriate it was that it should be a blanket-coat. Then I lay quietly, but with damp brow and clenched fists, striving to keep myself in hand. I had always thought that I was afraid of nothing except black-beetles, now I discovered that though real danger stirs the blood and is the most gloriously exhilarating thing on earth, unreal danger almost frightens the soul out of one. I discovered, too, that, next to jealousy, fear is the worst thing in the world.

Was that the noise of a slow, heavy footfall from that ghastly room, or was it merely the thumping of my own heart sounding in my ears? The rats scurried over the ceiling and through the walls, dislodging little showers of plaster as they went, but then I did not mind. Rats

were, so to speak, human. One rat ran out into a square of moonlight on the floor, and sat up, busily cleaning its soft face and round naked ears, but when I made a slight movement it shot across the shadowy floor like a trout through a pool.

Presently I fell into a troubled sleep, from which I awakened suddenly with every pulse in my body beating like an electric hammer. For a few moments I lay quite still, not daring even to turn my head on the pillow. It may sound ridiculous in cold daylight, but I was enveloped by a suffocating sense of something evil. I have never felt anything like it since—I don't think men and women still in the flesh and subject to the kindly impulses of human nature, could give off such an atmosphere of undiluted wickedness.

I received the impression—how far the thing was possible I leave to psychologists—that all the evil that had produced the crimes commemorated in that house was concentrated there, without any of the human attributes that, at other times, the criminals must have had. I had never given much thought to evil; knocking about the world as I had done, I had naturally been struck by the kindliness and innate rightness of the people in it, and being, I suppose, an un-moral person myself, who just did things because I felt like doing them, "good" and "bad" was a point of view that had never occurred to me. One just tried to play the game, which I suppose consists in keeping a stiff upper lip oneself and not letting other people down, and thought no more about it. But now, in this terrible riverside house, the very air seemed so malignant that I could hardly breathe it. Suddenly a sound as of a foot shuffled softly forward came from the other end of the room—I suppose the

door moved in the draught—and I let fly one piercing scream. Peter was with me in an instant, and I flung myself at him, sobbing wildly. He sat on the edge of the bed holding me, and presently my terror became articulate.

"Peter, they are there! By the door—the people you shut in the other room—Peter, I can't bear it! Don't leave me!"

"Hush, Viv! Do hush, dear. There's no one there, really. Nothing shall hurt you. Would you rather come into my room?"

"Yes, yes, anywhere! Oh, Peter, take me away!"

He picked me up and carried me into his little room, and when I was quieter he fetched the rest of the pillows and arranged them against the wall. I settled down on them and he sat beside me, holding my hand until I fell into a dreamless sleep.

The pallor of a London dawn was in the room when I awoke, feeling stiff and cramped. Peter, fast asleep, lay along the boards, one arm outflung, while his head had slipped on to my lap. I sat and looked at him in the wan light, smoothing the fair tumbled locks away from his forehead. He seemed such a boy asleep, there was something absolutely childlike about the curve of his thin cheek and the sweep of his lashes, which I always told him were wickedly long for a mere man. He stirred a little, as though troubled in his sleep, and bending over him, I saw wet drops were glistening on those absurd lashes, and I caught a few muttered words.

"Viv!" said Peter, "Viv!—oh, darling, don't. Don't, Viv, my darling——"

As I raised my startled head I felt a scorching blush mount in my face, and I sat very still. There seemed

something almost dishonourable in having heard that unconscious avowal from one who, when awake, hid so well what he now laid bare; I felt as though I had listened at a key-hole to what I was not meant to hear. The very innermost Peter had spoken—it was a revealing of naked soul to soul, and startled, abashed, mine drew back. He had called to me from his dreams, and it should be only a dream Viv who heard him. Affection, trust, protection, loyalty, all those I could give him, the gifts of a good she-comrade, who is a being half-mother and half man-friend, but more than that I felt it was not in me to give.

I stayed as quiet as possible to let him have his sleep out; the dawn light flowed into the room like water, and not until the grey pallor of it had given way to a bleak yellow did Peter wake. When he opened his eyes he first stared blankly, then with recognition, and I was able to meet his look as calmly as though I had been the unknowing Viv of the day before. He sat up as quickly as his cramped limbs would allow him.

"Good Heavens! I couldn't think where I was. Viv—I've been pillowing my horrid heavy head on you—why didn't you kick me off? You must be all stiff——"

"Not a bit! I'm only just awake myself," I lied. "Oh, Peter, what a horrible, horrible night it's been!"

He laid his hand lightly on my skirt where it was still warm from his head, then looked at me with a sudden smile.

"Well, I don't know that I altogether agree with you, princess!" he said.

CHAPTER XII

THE BABES IN ST. JOHN'S WOOD

SHORTLY before seven (as we discovered by my watch, which I had managed to redeem from the pawnshop) we heard the proprietor come to unlock the door. We waited quietly in the ground-floor room while he did so, and the moment his back was turned we slipped out without his being any the wiser. He must have received the shock of his life when he found what his wax figures had been doing in the night. Peter and I made up a little story about him; we decided he "got religion" and related his awful experience from a soap box.

We partook of coffee and bread at a stall on the Embankment before we felt fit to face the world again, and it was through idly commenting on the peculiar raw-sienna colour of the coffee that a bright idea struck me. It occurred to me that it was about the time of year when my old friends Jo Nash and Chloe Callendar, who used to be fellow-students of mine at Collarossi's, were wont to be at a little studio flat over a stable in St. John's Wood, and I thought they might perhaps be able to find me work as a model. Peter was charmed with the idea. I could see that he was feeling me a great responsibility, which was exactly how I felt about him.

"It's all very well for me, but what are *you* going to do?" I demanded.

The Milky Way

"Ah, I've got an idea, too!" quoth Peter.

"Tell me."

"Not till it comes off. Then I will, even if it doesn't. Are your friends really nice girls?"

"They're stunning girls. And oh, Peter, they have a bath room! If you knew how I am dying for a big bath!"

"I," said Peter, "intend to lavish sixpence on the luxury in question at the establishment of the L.C.C. But first we will take a 'bus, and that the 'bus may in its turn take us to St. John's Wood, I fear we shall have to demean ourselves by finding out whether it is going there."

We did, and it was; and presently I found myself, Peter beside me, walking through that wedge of a graveyard in St. John's Wood, where the leaves were still young and fresh on the slim, dusky-barked trees, and the sunlight flickered in swaying rounds and crescents over the dank old tombstones. Then we came out into the quiet little street, with its houses that have "seen better days," where Jo and Chloe lived—most of the houses washed a dark cream, and with broken-nosed cupids or a curly-maned lion or so upreared among the weeds and the strange bits of wreckage, such as big faded blue wheels and brown earthen drain-pipes, that littered the front gardens. Through a little *guichet* in a big wooden door, painted a stained weather-beaten peacock colour, I led Peter; across a yard where a few gleaming straws fluttered on the cobbles; while a row of stable doors round it proclaimed the place a mews. On the top half of a narrow door in one corner a beaten copper plate proclaimed that here was the "Hencoop Studio," for such is the name irreverent friends have given the little flat,

and Jo and Chloe have succumbed to it even to the extent of the copper plate.

I had always liked Jo Nash and Chloe Callendar, but as I flung myself on to the bosoms of their friendly, though paint-smeared, overalls, I knew that they were the passion of my young life, and I told them so in appropriate language. They replied: "We also have loved you from your childhood up and rocked you in your cradle. You shall eat the egg of peace with us and then have your bath."

"Please, you must have breakfast, too, Mr. Whymperis," said Chloe, in her best "little girl" manner, which, on Chloe, is one of the sweetest things I know. "We always have an egg for a friend, and a friend of Viv's is a friend of ours—if he will be."

Peter was, in his own words, "open to an egg," and we all sat down to breakfast, while we three womenkind talked at once.

"You're just in time," said Chloe; "we're giving a dance next week."

"A dance! How peerless! But I've nothing to wear."

"Oh, that's all right. It's a 'drency.'"

"That means fancy dress," I explained to Peter. "When we all lurked together as students we had a lot of portmanteau words. 'Prill' means 'pretty foul,' and it *is* a nice crinkle-your-nose-in-disgust word, isn't it?"

"Ah, but our most useful word was 'cuxt,'" said Jo. "I always maintain that that word fills a long-felt want in the English language."

"Don't tell me. 'Cuxt'——" murmured Peter thoughtfully. "I have it!" he shrieked. "And how

right you are. Think of the clumsiness of always saying 'mixed company.'"

"Exactly. And it's so useful. One says, 'Do you bathe cuxt?' Or, 'That's not a story to tell in cuxt.'"

"And we will dance cuxt at the drency, Peter," said I, "and I hope you won't think my dancing is prill. Peter, d'you realise you've never waltzed with me?" And I jumped up and started twirling round the room, waving my egg spoon. Jo picked up a concertina and began to play the Eton Boating Song, and the next moment Peter and I were dancing together. Chloe seized the lay figure and joined in, and the startling unsuitability of its blank face and stiff wooden limbs to Chloe's soft childish figure and loosened hair, made me cast Peter from me; whereupon Jo flung the concertina into the property cradle, and we all resumed our eggs. Peter melted gracefully away soon afterwards, to the L.C.C. baths, I suppose, and then Jo ran on the hot water for me, and Chloe—who is, so to speak, the wife, while Jo plays the man of the house—sprinkled the petals of a big, freshly-picked rose all over the top of the water.

I lay in the big bath and a blissful dream, while the rose leaves made the steam fragrant as incense, and the terrors of the waxen company faded from my mind. And slowly but surely my discovery about Peter, that disconcerting sentence murmured in his sleep, slipped away as well—it is so fatally easy to ignore what one does not wish to admit. A kindly rose leaf floated against my chin, and, ducking, I caught it between my lips and held it there. Oh, yes, life was good, while there were still friends, and breakfasts, and a big bath, and roses, and—a platonic. Here I nibbled the rose leaf impatiently, for I had an uneasy notion that really and truly

there are no such things as platonics. Turning my gaze to the past, I looked ruefully at the friendships, so pleasant at first, so apparently platonic, that had all flared up in the usual manner. When a whole crowd of us were at Collarossi's we had been great on platonics, and the only ones that did not end disastrously were of that order which we called "gilded." If you went in for those, you were entitled to put "P.G.P." after your name, which stood for "Professor of Gilded Platonics." This meant that a girl and man were great friends, danced principally with each other at the studio parties, went to Fontainebleau and Versailles on Sundays, and discussed everything in heaven and earth, but more particularly love, theology, their friends and themselves. I have heard gilded platonics described as "Say what you like, but no touching!"

This all sounds the merest platonic friendship, but the gilding, though difficult to put your finger on, was always there. It could not be called by so harsh a name as flirting, and yet—I don't quite know what else it was. Neither party had a right to feel aggrieved when the other became engaged, yet aggrieved he or she always was. I wasn't a P.G.P. myself, because the gilding didn't appeal to me, and the consequence was that while no hearts were seriously damaged on either side where this relaxation was permitted, yet all my platonics came to a bad end. If my friendship with Peter were going the same way—the thought of having to make Peter miserable was too much for me, and I choked, and a heave of bath-water made me swallow the rose-leaf like a pill.

"Come out of that! Are you dead?" shrilled Josephine through the key-hole.

"Coming," I called, and it was then that I told myself I must have dreamt the whole thing, and anyway there was nothing in it, and of course Peter cared for me only as a friend. I sang myself into my clothes and joined the others in the studio.

Towards evening Peter came in to tell us he had found himself an attic in Bloomsbury. That apparently simple commodity only exists for girls between the covers of those books where, so to speak, no heroine is complete without it. In real life it is a thing only a man can procure; I have raked Bloomsbury for an attic, a nice romantic attic where I could watch sunsets and starve, but when the landlady didn't look suspiciously at me there was always something that made me look suspiciously at her.

We all five spent a quiet evening at the Hencoop, doing monotypes on the backs of old etching-plates with our thumbs and stiff oil paint. The fifth of us was a very important person—the black cat Nell, commonly known as the Nelephant. She was more curious than beautiful, standing, like a lynx, too high on over-developed hind-quarters, and one of her ancestors must have been a Manx, for her tail was only an inch or so long. If you felt it you found it was composed of short joints like a bamboo, and every now and then she surprised her world by adding another joint in the night. But the Nelephant's hands were the most curious thing about her, for just by the little-toe-on-its-own that all cats have there was another very big one, like a thumb, and the positively human look this gave the Nelephant when she sat up at table was uncanny. When she walked she merely looked club-footed and made a noise like the clatter of high-heeled slippers. Peter induced her to

do a monotype by dint of rubbing her paw on the prepared zinc plate, but though he contended, when he had pulled the print, that the quality thus attained was most interesting, we declared its only value was as an example of the Bertillon system.

It was a delightfully silly evening, and Peter was gayer than I had known him since our meeting on the *Chough*, before Haggett's had drained all the light-heartedness out of him. Chloe, in a bright blue silk kimono and the depths of a tapestry armchair, looked the prettiest thing on earth. Very few people are really pretty, though many give an illusion of it, but, whether you admired her particular type or not, there was no denying Chloe had an exquisitely finished prettiness. She is a slim, milk-white, sweetly-sulky looking creature, with china-blue eyes set in a pale, small oval face, and very fair hair, so fine that it goes in a silky cloud like that of a Fra Angelico's angel, a being she resembles as far as looks go, for there is something suggestive of the pure light colours of the primitives in the almost excessive fairness of her skin and in the pale but definite marking off from it of her fair, thin brows and delicately folded lips. The angelic quality shows, too, in the close modelling over her small bones, and the fine lines of them from the chin to the close-set ear. Everything about her is pretty—the childish poses of her slim figure, her airs of petulance, her pouting under-lip, just a shade too full for the upper, which, with the powdering of freckles across her nose, gives the note of individuality to what would otherwise be a physique too perfect to be interesting. She always makes me feel I want to pet her and keep her from anything disagreeable, and between us, Jo (who is big and plain and brown-eyed)

and I had already withdrawn her from two unfortunate entanglements, with much loss of blood, so to speak.

We made silly jokes and cocoa so stiff that the spoons nearly stood up in it, and as we sat sipping it I brought forward the question of what I was to do next.

"Stay here till something turns up," said Chloe and Jo, but to that I demurred.

"Such a nuisance," yawned Chloe, "Viv's going to be poor and proud, as usual. So banal of her."

"Well, now, how would this do?" said Jo at last. "It would mean your going into the country, but I know you wouldn't mind that."

"Mind? I'd sell my soul for a mess of red earth."

"Well, then, listen to this. The Culver gang—you remember Ted Culver and his sister—long-haired survivals of the eighties?"

"Rather. They went in for 'being Bohemian' or something, didn't they? I often wonder what that is. I called on a woman once who took liqueur in her tea, and she said, 'I'm afraid you'll think me very Bohemian.' Well, press on."

"Ted and his sister don't go in for liqueurs any more. They've discovered Nature—not human, the other kind. They are being vegetarians or Pantheists or something down in Cornwall, with others like themselves, and they're going to paint a series of 'Nature-pictures.' You'd think most decent pictures were that, but apparently these are to be something extra-specially natural."

"And is the model to be—well, extra-specially *au naturl?*"

"Oh, they're having a 'pro' down for that. But I'm commissioned to find them someone who's an un-

modern wood-nymphy type, to droop over boulders and twine round trees in appropriate attitudes and some art muslin. Now, would you like to go? If so, I'll write to-morrow morning and suggest it. It needn't tie you to going if you find anything better in town. And I suppose even you aren't too proud to stay with us while you look for something."

"You're a practical angel, Jo. Do write. It can do no harm anyway."

This seemed all that could be done at present as far as my plans were concerned, but there was still Peter to be thought of, and when we had finished our cocoa and the fire was dying down and he had said good night, I went with him as far as the half-door into the yard.

"And you, Peter?" I asked him, taking him by the lapels of his coat as we stood together at the foot of the ladderlike stairs that ascended from the dim wilderness of sacks and harness.

"I've got my idea, you know, Viv. The one I told you about—at least, I said I wouldn't tell you about it till I knew more myself."

"Just as you like, Peter. Only I can't help worrying over leaving you alone in London like this. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"You must promise first. Please, Peter!"

"I say, I can't. It might be something I couldn't possibly do."

"You don't trust me?"

"Don't be a little silly. Of course I do!"

"Then why not promise without knowing?"

"Because it might be something divinely idiotic and

criminally altruistic on your part that I couldn't take advantage of."

"Oh, no, it's quite a prosaic little thing. But don't if you'd rather not. Only I had thought you would, for me."

"Oh, I say, Viv! All right! I promise. Now, what is it?"

"Only, if your idea is some time in coming off, and things get bad, that you'll make use of my watch. I'm going to leave it with you in case. I sha'n't want it, you see, with all my expenses being paid."

"My dear child, I'd so much rather not. You might want it; one never knows."

"My dear child, you're much more likely to want it than I am."

"But, hang it all, it's your watch!"

"*Peter!*"

"I beg your pardon, Viv. It was an ungenerous thing to say. But I'd so much rather it was my watch and I was lending it to you."

"Oh, the eternal masculine! But you promised, Peter."

"I know I did, damn it all! Look here, Viv, shall we say you keep the watch, and if I really need it, I swear to write and ask you for it."

"No, thank you. You wouldn't like to ask me for it when you were actually needing it. You take it now when you're not, then you'll use it when the time comes. A watch isn't a thing to tell the time by, you know."

I passed the chain over his head, tucking it away under the soft turn-down collar of his shirt.

The touch of the flannel reminded me of something else I wished to say.

The Babes in St. John's Wood

"And do remember, when you've washed your things, always to air them thoroughly. Your landlady will put them in front of the fire if you ask her nicely. You know if I hadn't aired them over my oil-stove at Haggett's you'd have had ptomaine or pneumonia or whatever the thing is, beginning with a 'p,' that one gets when one's caught a chill."

"Oh, my dear Viv, I can't go making a fool of myself before my landlady."

I registered a resolve to go and make love to Peter's landlady myself before I left town, and so did not press the point of the clothes-airing. As I buttoned Peter's coat across his chest, he suddenly caught both my hands and held them.

"Viv," he began, "Viv—— Oh, what's the good of words when I can *do* nothing for you? I'd like to build you a little gold shrine and put you in it, and burn candles and red lamps and incense in front of you. No, I wouldn't; your shrine ought to be a wayside one, with a big halo-hat to keep the rain off you, and wild flowers all a-growing and a-blowing before you. Oh, Viv, I'll write such divine nonsense to you some day, and you shall make pictures for it."

"But you must go home to bed now, my dear," I said, all the more prosaically because his words made an odd little glow of something that was not exactly pleasure run through me.

He gave a short laugh, then very slowly raised my hands and kissed them, one after the other.

"Bless you, Viv," he said, "you make me understand what is meant when we're told the angels are sexless."

"The thing that has always appealed to me about heaven," I remarked thoughtfully, "is that there is

neither marrying nor giving in marriage. It almost counterbalances there being no more sea. By the way, have you noticed the joys of heaven seem mostly negative?"

"The kingdom of heaven," said Peter very gravely, "is within us. Which means it's as much here and now as the outside world, and is one with it, like body and soul. And marrying should be one of the joys of both. There're still some things you've got to learn, Viv."

"But Jo and Chloe are wanting to get to sleep, and I'm very sleepy too, and you ought to be. Oh, Peter——"

"Well?—— What were you going to say, Viv?"

"Nothing. At least it was silliness. It's only that when you talk like that—about the things that matter, like the kingdom within us—I tremble lest you'll get some very hard knocks as you go through the world, and it makes me want to protect you so much, and one is so impotent. Now you must go, and mind you go straight to bed. Good night."

We stood looking for a moment into the moonlit courtyard; from their stalls came the stamping of horses, and the good smell of hay was in the air. Peter drew a long breath, then turned to shake hands.

"Good night, Viv," he said, "remember me in your —dreams."

CHAPTER XIII

WE INCREASE AND MULTIPLY

THE following day Chloe and Peter went off hand in hand to fetch Littlejohn, as we had come to the conclusion that it was better not to let any of the members of Haggett's company know my address. Peter, very brushed-looking, appeared at the Hencoop to collect Chloe, a pink rosebud in his buttonhole. Also, obedient to my wish, he was wearing my watch, so that at any crisis he could rush straightway to a pawnshop and deposit it—for, as I had pointed out, it would be a great pity if a job came his way and for lack of capital he could not seize upon it at the instant.

"The watch is lying against my heart, which is beating in time to its tick," he assured me, "so I hope it doesn't gain, because it would be very sad if I were to become fast."

"It was always said of our set at Collarossi's," I remarked thoughtfully, "that we were so charming because we were rapid without being fast. But, as a matter of fact, that watch loses."

"I hope it doesn't follow that my heart will get lost," said Peter anxiously. "You don't think it would be safer if I handed it over to you in exchange for the watch?"

"I do not."

"By the way," he continued, "this rose is for you. It's the pink flower of a blameless life."

"My career has been described by a friend of mine as a blameless past, capable of misconstructions," I replied, bending to sniff the rose.

"Your little nose is all over pollen," said Peter. "Yes, that's why it's pink. Not your nose, but the rose. To match your past."

"It is not my past we should be considering now, but your future. Peter, do tell me while Chloe's getting ready—what *is* your idea?"

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd better. It's very simple—journalism. I have always understood that to be the refuge of the destitute."

"Peter, how exciting! But how about your other writing?"

"That will have to wait. Poems and things don't make money. I did try very hard at popular fiction once—I began a newspaper feuilleton, but it wasn't a success, because I lost control of myself so. It started beautifully with the heroine 'drawing forth her watch warm from her waist,' but when it pressed on to the villainess 'dropping her Mazawattee-coloured eyes to the floor with a sickening thud' I had an idea it wouldn't do, and when the villain 'slank away like a whipped cream' I felt all was over between me."

"And so you broke it off. What was it called?"

"'Nights Errant'—without the 'K.' No one knew why, but it was. There was an archduchy in it, and an archduke, and all sorts of arch people. There was an English cathedral charwoman with one blue eye and one brown, who was the head of a secret society; and there was a pure young English girl, and a muscular curate called Jack. And there was a man of the world with a past, and a rare smile; a bloated aristocrat, an iron-

jawed financier, several murders and some aeroplanes. It was a sort of William Whiteley in the way of feuilletons."

"It must indeed have been strangely handsome. But, Peter, tell me—how are you going to set about journalising?"

"Call at all the offices, I suppose. It'll be pretty beastly."

"Would you like me to come too? Or I could do some of them for you. I might even get a job myself, which would keep me up here with you and Jo and Chloe."

"It's worth trying, anyway. How splendid if we could get on to the same paper, wouldn't it? Hullo, here comes Miss Callendar. What on earth is she doing?"

Chloe was holding the protesting Nelephant upside down on one arm, while with the other she tried to calm the creature's large hands that were splayed fiercely in protest.

"I'm practising how to carry the baby," explained Chloe. "I've never done such a thing in my life. Oh, dear, I know I shall have no control over it!"

"'It,' indeed!" I exclaimed. "Littlejohn is a lady, if you please, and would never demean herself by carrying on like the Nelephant. Besides, you've got her on the wrong arm! On your left, Chloe, and take care to support her head."

Here the Nelephant gave a scream of rage and clattered loudly from the room on her superfluous toe nails. Chloe straightened her holland gown and drew some gloves over her scratches with an outraged expression.

"I trust I know one end of a baby from the other,"

said she loftily. "Now, Mr. Whymperis, if you're ready, I am." And with an air as of people leading a forlorn hope they departed.

Jo and I spent the afternoon in making me some much needed pyjamas out of an old silk "background" that was rather faded in places, but quite sound, and of a lovely peach-bloom colour. We had no machine and as we sat leaping up the seams—(at Collarossi's one did everything by leaps, generally "screaming leaps." One "leapt screaming" on to the tramcars, one's brush "leapt screaming over the canvas," etc.)—as we sat leaping up the seams hand over fist, we talked. It was the kind of talk you are supposed to indulge in when you are brushing your hair at night.

"Viv, I'm worried," began Jo. "I want your help."

"My help? It's about Chloe, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course. How d'you think she seems?"

"Prettier than ever, if that were possible, and with still more of that look as though she'd just mislaid her halo and a pair of wings for a moment."

"Yes, but I don't mean her looks. I mean herself. Doesn't she strike you as being rather overstrung? No continuity?"

"She always rather flitted from flower to flower, but I have noticed that it's more so. And she has that expectant little look and way of humming to herself that she always has when she's more or less thinking herself in love."

"She's living on her nerves," said Jo, "and this time it isn't a healthy excitement. Not that Chloe's to blame; she means no more harm than a butterfly, and sees none, but that very fact makes her reckless."

"A man, of course?"

"Of course. And he's got two wives already."

"My dear Jo!"

"Well, he divorced the first one, and I should think by the way he's going on he wants the second one to divorce him. And I don't intend Chloe to be the excuse."

"Oh, it's unthinkable! Chloe! Oh, how can he?"

"Oh, I don't say he means any real harm. He's carried off his feet by her looks. Only, you know, men can have the best of intentions over-ridden by the worst of impulses. I'm so awfully afraid he'll lose his head, and then, if Chloe's in a sympathetic or a reckless mood, what mightn't happen?"

"He's coming to the dance?"

"Yes. And the music, and dancing, and lights, and things—you know what I mean——"

"Chloe's susceptibility to atmosphere? Yes, I know. We must keep as much of an eye on her as we can."

"That won't be much. By the way, it's Maurice Purvis, the painter. His thing was *the* splash at the New English last year. Oh, you were away."

"Yes, but I heard about it. And I've heard about him too. Jo, what is there to be done?"

"Well, I've got a plan for the dance, but it depends on you, Viv. Chloe's to be a masked Folly, and her dress is copied from our old property one—the one with the ruff and the tulle skirts, you know. And I thought if we freshened that up you could wear it; and masked, with your hair covered, no one would know which was which. Can you still imitate voices like you used?"

"Yes."

"And—and so, I thought, if he——"

"If he's going to be strenuous, I'm to manage it's to me and not to Chloe?"

"Oh, Viv, it sounds awful! I feel a mean pig. I suppose I ought to let her take care of herself. You're only a kid, when all's said and done, though one forgets it when one isn't looking at you. But you know how absolutely mastered by her moods she is, while you always give the impression of having some steady, central point, however things ebb and flow round you. It isn't that Chloe would knowingly not play the game, but the emotions of the moment mean such a lot to her that she wouldn't let herself stop to think."

"Don't you worry about me. I'll do my best at the dance, Jo. We must wash and iron the ruff next thing we do. Let's sort out the things now."

We rummaged in the recesses of the property box, sorting skirts from tights, and finally brought together the component parts of the Folly costume, all rather in need of the friendly iron and some attentions from a needle. Jo and I were busy supplying these, when I heard on the cobbles of the courtyard the footsteps I had been eagerly awaiting.

"There they are! there they are!" I cried, jumping up from my cross-legged position on the floor. "There's my Littlejohn! Now you shall see how peerless she is, Jo!"

I ran to the stairs and scrambled down them in time to receive Littlejohn from Chloe's arms at the bottom. Chloe looked slightly flushed but triumphant, while most of Littlejohn's face was obscured by the round black disc of a rubber "comforter."

"Where did she get that?" I demanded. "I never

allowed her to have such a thing. It's a frightful germ-carrier and will spoil the shape of her mouth. Peter, you know I never allowed it."

"Be thankful it is what it is, and not a gag or a bowstring," replied Chloe energetically as she led the way up the ladder. "Oh, Viv, never has friendship been strained as ours has this day."

"Why? Did she cry?" I asked absently. I had removed the "comforter" and was enthralled by the fact that Littlejohn was too pleased to see me again for resentment. Her usually placid, not to say profoundly immobile countenance, was dimpled and puckered with smiles, and she gurgled dewily.

"Cry!" repeated Chloe. "Did she cry? No—she yelled, she howled, she shrieked, she outdid the trams, and the hoot of a motor paled before her. In the 'buses everyone looked at us as though we were murdering her, and one woman said, 'Poor little thing! Wonderful how they always know who's their friend!' When it came to a policeman advancing towards us as we waited to change 'buses, I took a dive into the nearest likely shop and bought this. And the only wonder is we didn't deposit Littlejohn under the counter and leave her there."

"Did it cry then, my poor precious?" said I.

"And now she behaves like a saint in a painted window," observed Peter disgustedly, "as though to make us out liars. I suppose it was being rent from the Changeling she resented. If she went on like that when you left, they must have been pleased to see the last of her at Haggett's."

"Oh, how was the poor Changeling?"

"Don't!" said Peter.

"Why?" I asked, startled. "There's nothing wrong, is there!"

"Oh, no. Except that the Changeling, having got fond, for the first time in what can hardly be called her life, her existence, rather—of two other human creatures, has now lost them and feels lost herself. When she first saw us coming she was sitting on the step of your old caravan with the infant on her lap, and when she caught sight of me she thought the person with me must be you. She jumped up and ran past me to Miss Callendar, and then her face all went dead suddenly, if you know what I mean. And then she must have guessed—heaven knows how—that we'd come for the kid, for she made a dash back to the caravan, stuck Littlejohn inside, slammed the door and stood against it. I felt about as comfortable as a celluloid dog running after an asbestos cat across hell."

"Well—and then?"

"Well—we were there to get the kid, and knew it was as much as our place was worth to come back without her. We got her. The Changeling gave a sort of a howl and did a bolt somewhere. I found Haggett and asked him to comfort her a bit—give her jam for tea or something. It was rather like asking the dome of St. Paul's to be kind to one of the bits of mosaic."

In silence I deposited Littlejohn in the property cradle which I had prepared for her. Why, oh, why, hadn't I a little money? Then I would look after the Changeling for ever and ever, and the Changeling would look after Littlejohn, and we should all be happy. My joy in having my baby again, my anxiety about Chloe and thought of my own plans were all over-ridden by the mental vision Peter's account had conjured up. Still

silently I helped to get the supper, while Peter and Chloe lay in opposite armchairs and took a well-earned rest.

When we began the meal the late evening sun was shining in at the little square-paned, deep-silled window looking into the yard. It shone on the pale purple plumes of a branch of wisteria in an earthenware jar; found out a corner of the polished walnut cradle, and gleamed round the edges of Chloe's little cinquecento head as she sat on the sill, giving her a prismatic halo and making her face and slim curved-forward neck a delicate half-tone from which the blue of her shadowed eyes gained in depth. She was soon talking gaily, although I knew the serio-comic tragedy of the Changeling had touched her quick imagination at the time, but whereas Peter, for instance, found no escape from the depression of seeing suffering save in work or time, Chloe, in sheer self-defence, put all thought of it behind her as soon as she could. Jo was as admirably absorbed in Littlejohn as even I could have wished, and sat where she could keep a watchful eye on that infant's once more placid and sleeping countenance. I talked of nothing and thought of the Changeling. It was thus that we were all employed, with cocoa-drinking as a common occupation, when there came the sound of a stealthy creeping on the ladder. We all started rather nervously, saving Littlejohn, who remained abstracted and unperturbed. Then Peter jumped up and, opening the door, went on to the landing and peered into the dimness. I followed him.

There, nearly at the top of the ladder and crouched against it, was the Changeling. Through the gloom her white, frightened wedge of a face gazed up at us

like the face of someone rising for the last time in a flood. I gave Peter a gentle shove, and he disappeared quietly into the studio. Then I knelt down, and stretched out my arms. It was a shock to see the Changeling half-flinch at my approach. I stroked back the stiff, bleached hair, talking to her gently and very slowly in the way I had found she understood best, and for a few moments she stayed in her crouching position on the ladder. Then she came swiftly up and hurled herself at me, talking very fast and doubtless expressing much—to herself—but, as always with her in moments of excitement, intelligible words there were none. I drew her to her feet and into the studio, where Peter had told the others of the new turn in our affairs, and I found Jo ready with a cup of cocoa. The Changeling marched straight over to the cradle, looked within, gave a little sigh of satisfaction, and came and sat beside me on the window sill. All the time she drank her cocoa and devoured her bread and jam she kept up a little stroking of my sleeve or skirt, until, her meal over, with the abruptness characteristic of her she was suddenly fast asleep, her head tipped back against the sill and a smile on her half-opened mouth. My eyes met Jo's with a question in them, and she and I held a consultation, in her bedroom, lest the disconcerting wits of the Changeling should gain alertness with sleep.

"You can't turn her away," said Jo.

"No, of course I can't. But I can't plant her and Littlejohn and myself on you. I must find new quarters."

"Rats! We can squeeze her in here. There's the hayloft I'm allowed to use whenever I want it. She can have that. We'll fix her up a bed. Don't talk

nonsense, Viv. What is worrying me is how she here. I hope Peter or Chloe didn't give away y address at Haggett's, because if so, they may be a her."

"We didn't," said Peter, from the doorway, aga which he was reclining. "She must have followed —goodness knows how. Had she any money?"

"I don't know. Oh, yes, she would have had ne all that half-crown I left with Haggett for her. even so, how she had the intelligence is what beats It's simply uncanny. Oh, Peter, the poor Changel I'm glad, glad, glad, she's come!"

As I spoke I thought of the journey, accompli much as a dog achieves across unknown country tl wonderful voyages of which one hears; I thought the desperate, half-frightened cunning with which must have crept on to 'buses after Peter and Cl always managing to keep out of their sight, until last, after a long waiting, that must have been one pure nervousness, in the yard or the store-room at bottom of the ladder—she had crept up to me.

Late that night, as I lay in my impromptu bed the little box room where all the old canvases v stacked, I felt very happy. I was certainly collec a family in my course through life.

There is a German fairy story which one meet many slightly differing forms in the old books for c dren, which tells of a youth—generally the dullard his family—who attains a magic goose with feat of fine gold. Everyone who touches the goose, or even touches the man who first laid finger on it, those behind him, becomes helplessly stuck in a l procession. My progress through life seemed of m

the same nature, though I think I must have been my own goose, and certainly not a golden one.

There would now be both the Changeling and Littlejohn for Peter and me to support as well as ourselves, and the thought gave confidence. For, as Peter had said to me in the courtyard that evening as he went away, Providence might see fit to give one a bad time oneself, but would certainly never desert such helpless innocents as the Changeling and Littlejohn.

"It's really a sort of selfish insuring of ourselves," said Peter.

CHAPTER XIV

A FLUTTER IN FLEET STREET

ON the following Monday morning—which I have often thought since was a tactless time to choose—Peter and I began the pilgrimage of Fleet Street. First we went down it on the top of an omnibus, because Peter said you couldn't hope to be any good in a place until you had grasped the atmosphere of it; and at the sight of the offices of famous papers whose names stood out in huge gilt letters across the dingy brickwork, even I, who had no pretensions to journalism beyond an idea of drawing fashion plates, felt a rising thrill of excitement.

Then Peter started going into the offices at one end of the street, while I began at the other, and after two days' fruitless work we met in the middle, outside the last shrine of journalism unvisited by either of us. We decided to attack it hand in hand, but we first had to go back to the Hencoop with various sweets and pastries Jo had commissioned us to buy for the drency that night. Laden with paper bags we made our way back to St. John's Wood, and found the studio in wild confusion—"backgrounds" heaped in a pile preparatory to being draped on the walls, the two model thrones stacked one on top of the other, and the floor one litter of lilac boughs and dog daisies. Jo, her head tied up in a silk handkerchief, was strewing tea-leaves amongst

everything with more impartiality than judgment. Chloe was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Chloe?" I asked, as I began to spread potted shrimp sandwiches, which were to be optimistically labelled "caviare."

"Buying floor-powder and things—with Maurice Purvis," answered Jo, rather shortly.

Later, washed and brushed, having snatched a bread-and-buttery kind of lunch, Peter and I prepared to depart once more, but Jo called me back.

"Viv—swear you'll turn up in time for this evening? You won't let anything stand in the way? I'm worried to death about Chloe and this Purvis creature. Somehow I believe things will come to a head to-night. And I look to you to save the situation. You simply mustn't fail us."

"I promise you I'll be back in time. Come along, Peter, we shall have to fly."

We flew—on a No. 13 'bus, as ill omen and the arrangements of the London General Omnibus Company would have it—and on the way we compared our experiences of Fleet Street. Mine had been fairly simple. Almost everyone had been kind, but nothing had resulted. I had nearly always attained the editors, because their underlings were so good-natured and took so much trouble over me. From what I had seen of Fleet Street I could say with truth that the spirit of rivalry and grudging of which one hears simply does not exist, at least among the poor under-dogs like oneself. It was the upper-dogs, the plump and inordinately worried potentates who sat ensconced in vast leather armchairs, who were the unpleasant people, either smoking in my face and not opening the door for me, or, far

worse, being too civil in that odious "What-a-charming-little-girl-you-are" kind of way. Whenever Peter had penetrated as far as an editor, which was not often, nothing more than an invitation to leave his name and address had resulted; save in the precincts of one Sunday paper, where Peter had offered to write his reminiscences of clergy he had met, and was asked if instead he knew of any "safe scandals in society." The editor had added, with a genial smile, "Blood's what we want."

Now, as we went together up the flight of steps leading to the great glass swing-doors of the *Weekly Drum*, we felt that our last chance had come, and it was with a quickly beating heart that I approached the commissionaire, who, medal-bedecked, loomed from a kind of hutch in the hall. He was a dear man, and I believe it was owing to his kindly offices that we were at length admitted to the innermost shrine of the *Weekly Drum*.

It was a large, comfortable room, lined with books and boasting the inevitable scarlet-and-blue Turkey carpet; a little man in big spectacles and with a mop of grey hair, swung round at us on a revolving chair as we entered. Then he got up and pushed a steadier variety forward for me. When we were all seated he looked from one to the other of us.

"The Babes in the Wood redivivi," he remarked with apparent irrelevance. "Well, well, I mustn't waste my time. What do you want?"

"We——" began Peter and I together, then stopped.

"Ladies first," said the little man. "Now, then, Miss——" he referred to a slip of paper in his hand—"Miss Lovel.

> Lord Lovel he stood at his castle gate,
> Combing his milk-white steed . . .

—how does it go on, that old song? Ah, well, to business."

"We want work, if you please," said I.

"One or t'other of you, or both?"

"Both, if possible. If not, one."

"And what have you done up till now, in the two or three years that have elapsed since you left your cradle?"

"I've done a great many things," said I, drawing myself up, and wishing I hadn't such a farthing-face and didn't look so like a little boy. "I belong (as we say in Cornwall) to be a painter, and I illustrated a book last winter for Herriot & Dale, but they went bankrupt, and so I went in a cargo-boat where I met Mr. Whymperis, and he took me to a travelling theatre. And now I've left there, and Mr. Whymperis has left too, and I'm living with some painter friends in their studio, but of course I can't go on sponging on them."

"Dear me," murmured the great man, "and Mr. Whymperis—what is he doing?"

"He's writing in an attic in Bloomsbury, but as we are great friends we thought it would be nice if we looked for work together. You've no idea how disheartening it is doing things by yourself."

"And I am sure that the young man here has great ambitions and is only by way of marking time," said the editor shrewdly. "Tell me, sir, d'you wish to settle down to Fleet Street?"

"I think it might be a jolly useful school," replied Peter, after a second's hesitation.

"While you're preparing some epoch-making work, eh?" asked the editor. "I know your kind. And you, Miss Vivien Lovel, are you a genius too?"

"Oh, dear no. I'm just going to make pictures for the great work, but you see one can't do even that unless one can make enough to live on. Do you think we should be any good on your paper?"

"Well, you see," the editor confided, "things don't happen like that in a newspaper office. I wish to goodness they did. It's the great complaint one has against life, that it's so little like the books. If Mr. Whymperis here could only shut us all up between the covers of a novel I should be able to say to you, 'Pray join the staff at once at a salary of five quid a week each.' As things are, I can't. Why, good heavens, you—you lost lamb!" he cried savagely, shoving his jaw at me in a spasm of anger, "what good are you, with your big grey eyes, to us? You'd be taken in by anyone who spun you any kind of a yarn. Stop, though, I'm not sure your big grey eyes mightn't be some good in getting a 'story' out of people who won't melt to an ordinary reporter." He stared at us thoughtfully, then: "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at length. "You've heard of the Murford mystery?"

"Somebody whose motor car has gone over a precipice into the sea and drowned them?" I asked ungrammatically.

"Ah, but has it? That's the question. We've good reason to think that it's all a blind and that Mr. Murford, as he calls himself, is in hiding somewhere. The police are after him on a charge of getting money under false pretences. You find him and get us a 'scoop' on it, and I'll see what I can do for you."

There was an awful pause. I felt as though I'd been bidden to find a roc's egg or the philosopher's stone. Peter stood up and, thrusting his hands into his trousers

pockets, rattled the two halfpennies he kept there for the purpose.

"Right O! We'll have a shot," said he.

"Well said. You're the right stuff," said the editor. "Off you go. Oh, stop a moment——" he, in his turn, dived into a pocket from which he retrieved a sovereign, which he held out to us. "Expenses, you know," he said; "quite the custom, I assure you."

"Editors are a much maligned race," I cried, as Peter and I emerged into Fleet Street again. "And now—how to find Mr. Murford!"

That was the question. How, indeed!

"What we want," said Peter, "is a clue. The best detectives always begin with a clue."

"Let's buy a paper and get up-to-date, anyway," I advised. When we had bought it we went and sat in the Temple Gardens to read it. What was known however, did not amount to much. A "Mr. Murford," apparently a man of means, had, a few months ago, appeared at the Manor House of Fengate, in Gloucestershire. He lived in a lordly way and had no profession beyond making himself liked, in which he seems to have thoroughly succeeded. One morning he had gone out alone in a new car, which was discovered next day in a shattered heap at the foot of a cliff in Somerset. Of the man who had been its occupant nothing was to be found except his cap, which lay in a rock pool. The village and neighbouring gentry were much distressed, until the chief constable made the discovery that the water at that part was never over two feet in depth and that no currents set there. The local tradesmen whose bills had all been running on came forward with a tale of all "Mr. Murford" owed them, and, as Peter

said—already journalese phrases seemed to trip off his tongue—" the matter assumed a different complexion—a more brunette complexion," he added.

" What an egg for us if we could only find him!" I sighed. " I wonder if there's a portrait of him anywhere. Turn that page and see."

He did, and there was—one of those blurred photographs which, while destroying detail, seem to bring out all salient characteristics more strongly. The man showed plainly as a long-jawed fellow with a dome-like brow and a short, black moustache over a flexible mouth; his rather high cheek bones caught the light. " A very definite type," announced Peter.

I stared at the picture in silence, for somewhere at the back of my memory the thought that I had seen the face before was pricking at me. Could it be merely that, as Peter said, it belonged to a type? Suddenly I gave a crow of excitement.

" Oh, Peter, I know him! What stupendous luck! It's Edgar Murdock."

" Viv, explain yourself! You make my brain reel in its socket. Who is Edgar Murdock? And why is he Mr. Murford?"

" I don't know why he's Mr. Murford, but I'm sure it's Edgar. Why, he used to clean the boots and read Marcus Aurelius."

" Viv, I don't want to have to shake you in public. Do explain. Whose boots?"

" Ours—Father's and mine. We were lodging one summer at a queer old tumbledown place called Secrecy Farm—I believe priests or cavaliers or someone used to hide there. Isn't it a gorgeous name—Secrecy Farm? And Mrs. Murdock ran the farm, which was practically

moribund, and her son Edgar did the boots, and other things, of course. He was about sixteen, and awfully clever in a way one felt would never come to anything. Mrs. Murdock was a bleak sort of woman, and only lived for him. But, funnily enough, she was very fond of me, and was awfully kind to me."

"How odd!" said Peter. "It seems that the next thing to do is to go to Secrecy Farm. Where is it?"

"In London."

"It all sounds like a 'New Arabian Nights.' Proceed, fair damsel."

"It's Hampstead way. Let's take a 'bus."

On the 'bus we laid our plans. Peter was to sit behind a bush on the Heath while I went to the farm and asked for Mrs. Murdock. Then my own intelligence, which unluckily has never been of the detective order, was to guide me. We broke into the editor's sovereign for our 'bus tickets—a lordly proceeding that seemed to annoy rather than impress the conductor. That little unpleasantness over and our plans laid, I sat busy remembering all I could about Mrs. Murdock. She had been a hard-working, bright-eyed woman with a mouth like a rat trap, and a wonderful passion for her son, so strong that it showed, in spite of herself, in the softening of her whole look when it fell on him. She had worked like a man on the farm to give him more time for his education—he attended a second-rate sort of private school—and every halfpenny she could lay by was to de devoted to the same cause. Her Edgar was to be somebody in the world, and don't you forget it! She herself could neither read nor write, and Edgar had to make out the accounts for her. And he had turned out badly after all! Poor, harsh, fond Mrs. Murdock!

A Flutter in Fleet Street

I broke off in my musings to bid Peter glance at my watch. It was already four o'clock. I should have to be back at the Hencoop by eight at the latest, if I meant to change in time for the drency and help in the last preparations. I wondered a little about Mr. Purvis, whom I was to pursue with such a watchful eye that night, even as I was now hoping to pursue Edgar Murdock. I felt myself singularly unfitted for either task, and I was not sure that such a Jack o' Dreams as Peter would be much help. The fact of the matter was, that Fate had cast us in this affair for the part of a Sherlock Holmes, and by nature we were nothing more sleuth-like than a Watson.

CHAPTER XV

SECRECY FARM

I INSTALLED Peter behind a gorse bush on the Heath, instructing him how to find the house should I be away for more than a couple of hours, and then I started off.

Secrecy Farm lies in a backwater of Hampstead, down a road that cheats you for a few hundred yards into thinking you are in the country, until you find it melts drearily into some waste land dug up for building, and hideous with piles of crudely coloured bricks. The road is shaded by elms instead of the ubiquitous plane trees of cities, and, though dust-filmed, it is true, pink campion and strong, rank hemlock grow along the hedges. The road humps itself into a bridge over a sluggish little canal, on whose muddy brown waters float little patches and threads of creamy scum, and by this canal, the length of a field from the road, stands Secrecy Farm.

As I drew near I saw that nailed to the palings was a notice board inscribed in big, white letters on a black ground, with these words: "Secrecy Farm. This desirable freehold with four and a half acres of land, to be sold. Apply Horton and Jenks, Golder's Green."

My heart sank. It did not seem as though our cause would benefit much by this expedition, but I opened the gate and approached the house. It is a low, white building, or rather, once was white, but now was defaced

by long, meandering, green stains. Several panes of the small windows were broken, the woodwork, long unpainted, had turned a soft peacock-blue colour, and the weeds grew long and lank in the strip of ground between the house and the field. I walked round to the back, where I knew the main door was. I was greeted by a perfect storm of barking from two dogs, one chained a little way down the garden and the other at the further end of the house. They tugged at their chains like demons, and I prayed the links might hold, as I stood and surveyed the scene. Secrecy Farm had been ramshackle when I had first known it; it was far more so now. To the left of the door was a flight of wooden steps, that led to a sort of little railed platform, on to which a French window opened—I remembered how incongruous that window had always struck me as being —it introduced what was, somehow, a sinister note of modernity.

As I looked at it now, I thought I saw a slight movement behind the curtained panes in the decrepit old house, and I turned towards the garden. That showed signs of fairly recent care—a tall row of scarlet runners leant from their supporting sticks; beyond them I caught sight of a strip of cabbages, showing a cold, blue-green beside the dark, coppery red of some beet-root leaves. Beyond that again, a rick of dull, sad-coloured hay blocked any further view. Against it an elevator was leaning, and the wind rattled it in all its iron joints, so that it sounded like the clanking of a ghostly chain. I turned to the house again, and knocked with the ash stick I carried, against the door. At first, nothing but the renewed fury of the dogs' barking answered me; then I heard an inner door open softly. I knocked

again, and this time a hesitating step shuffled down the passage. Then the door was opened a few inches, and I caught the gleam of an extraordinarily bright pair of eyes.

"Ah, it *is* you, Mrs. Murdock!" I said. "Don't you remember me?"

She opened at that, and Mrs. Murdock stood before me. She, like the farm, was very much as I remembered her, only more so. Her hair had gone very thin above her high forehead, which gave her something of a vulture look. Her yellow, old face was extraordinarily wrinkled, but as she recognised me, her smile made all the wrinkles break up and run into wide curves, like the circles made by a stone in a pool.

"Why, it's Miss Viv!" she exclaimed, and I thought I noted something besides pleasure in her voice—relief.

"I happened to be in London again," I said, "and I thought I'd look you up. May I come in?"

"Eh, what?" she asked, leaning forward. "I've gone very hard of hearing, my dear."

I repeated my question with a shout.

"Why—well, yes, come in, dearie," she then answered, and, indeed, I had already stepped into the narrow passage. I saw the paper was peeling in damp patches off the walls, and the boards were bare, while Mrs. Murdock herself was wrapped in an old magenta shawl, that trailed in a moth-eaten triangle from her back.

"Let me see, this was the sitting-room Father and I used to have!" I exclaimed, my hand on the door of the room which gave on to the little balcony. "I must just look in." And, before she could stop me, I had turned the handle. Rather to my surprise, it yielded,

and I looked in—to see Edgar Murdock standing in the middle of the room, which was quite unfurnished, save for the curtains over the window. That he was "Mr. Murford" I had no doubt, now I had set eyes on him again, in spite of the fact that he was wearing a dark, pointed beard, which must, of course, be false.

"Why, how d'you do?" I exclaimed, mechanically, holding out my hand. It was not until he had taken it, and I felt how cold his was, that the full realisation of what I was doing flashed through me.

This was Mrs. Murdock's son, and Mrs. Murdock had, in her queer, brusque, half-shamed way, been very kind to Father and myself in the old days. I had been counting on that old kindliness of hers in coming there that afternoon. And I had been wont to help Edgar to construe Marcus Aurelius in the original; uncertain and devious as he was, in many disconcerting ways, he had a kind of brilliance. And now to track down Mrs. Murdock's son was impossible. I suppose the excitement of the thing, and the fact that Mrs. Murdock herself had not entered into my calculations, had prevented me seeing clearly before. Anyway, once having presented myself as a friend, and being welcomed as such, I had made myself powerless. After all, it was not my business how dishonest Edgar Murdock had been. And yet—there on the Heath was Peter—Peter, who, if he could bring off this "scoop," would be in a fair way to success in Fleet Street. I felt a profound distaste for the whole affair, and I wanted time to think. Mrs. Murdock broke in on the little silence.

"Well, since you've taken all the trouble to come out here," she said, in her still brisk and harsh old voice, that had alarmed me so, at first, as a child, "you must take a

cup of tea with us. Edgar's grown a rich man and respected, as I always knew he would, so you'll have no call to mind sitting down wi' him. Come into the kitchen, there's a bit o' fire there."

I followed her into the kitchen, which was empty, save for a few chairs, a table, and a large wooden case with a wire-netting window, which stood against the blotched and discoloured wall. Behind the netting two ghost-pale ferrets leapt up and down, up and down, like wan reflections of the leaping firelight.

"You've only just caught us," went on Mrs. Murdock, "we're flitting. I suppose you saw the notice on the gate."

"Are you going far away?" I asked.

"Only to——" she was beginning, when her son struck in with a stentorian shout of: "There's no milk in the house, you know, mother. Hadn't you better get some from the shop over the bridge?"

"So I had," said Mrs. Murdock, not heeding my protestations, for to break bread with her was the last thing I wanted just then.

"You must take a bit o' something with us, Miss Viv," said Mrs. Murdock firmly, "and all the stock's sold off, unless you count the dogs and the ferrets. Thankee, Eddie"—for he had brought her a bonnet and a black cloth jacket, and was helping her into them. "I don't let my gentleman son do my errands for me out of doors, so he pays his old mother out by waiting on her in the house," she added, trying to disguise her pride in the gloomy-looking Edgar. She let herself out at the back, and Edgar Murdock, alias "Mr. Murford," and I sat looking at each other from opposite sides of the hearth in the dim kitchen, where a twilit greenness reigned, ow-

ing to the great lilac and syringa bushes that had been allowed to grow up against the window.

Suddenly Edgar cleared his throat and began to speak.

"Remember the old days, Miss Lovel?" he began, "how your father used to go off to the British Museum, and how you used to do little sketches about the place? I still have one you did of the old duck and her ducklings in the sunlight. And you used to help me with my reading."

I nodded but could find nothing to say.

"How do you think the old lady's looking?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh—I should have known her anywhere. But I don't think she looks very well."

"She's dying," he said harshly.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. The doctors give her a month or so at the outside. She's killed herself—for me. I'm taking her away, now I've found out, to look after her for the last time we'll have together. You must have thought us in a bad way when you saw the house all bare and neglected, but it's merely that everything's sold. Even our own things are packed ready except just what we need for one more night. As far as money goes, it isn't a case of bad times—with her, thank goodness!"

"And with you—it is," I said, the words slipping out before I knew.

"What d'you mean?" he asked sharply.

Then I made up my mind. It seemed that the chief thing was to help the Murdocks, and I knew Peter would understand.

"I mean that I know you're 'Mr. Murford.' But I

don't know why you did it. Eddie, why did you? You're not naturally dishonest, I know. There must be something at the back of it."

"Why should I trust you?" he asked sharply. "No, I didn't mean that. But—why are you here?"

"I—I came because I recognised you in the papers. I'm by way of being a journalist, and I was given the job. But I won't do anything that would hurt Mrs. Murdock, if you'll tell me why you did it."

"You yourself have given the reason that's at the bottom of it all when you say her name. And she'll be back in five minutes," he added, glancing nervously at his watch; "five minutes to make you see my point of view!"

"I'm listening."

He did not begin at once, but sat with his false beard sunk on his chest and I gazed at it in idle fascination, wondering how he made it look so natural. Then, clasping the arms of his chair, he began, still looking into the fire.

"You remember how it was when I was a boy, how nothing was too good for me? Well, the time came for me to go out into the world and begin all those wonders she believed in. I started at your job—journalism. The old lady nearly died of pride when I used to come home and show her my press cuttings. They were only the usual things—murder reports and suchlike, but I had to read them all to her, because she can't read, you know. She used to sit and finger them. Then—I got the sack. I was no good at the job, really. My education! She'd spent so much on it, herself as well as her money. It was no good. Snippets here and there. I was more 'cultured'—hateful word—than most of the men on my

rag, but I'd nothing I could turn to any use. I, too, had believed I was bound to do wonders. Getting the sack was a shock to me, but I told myself it must be that I was too good for them. At last I got on to another paper. I found it was a swindling sort of concern, flourishing chiefly by blackmail. I'd begun to realise by then that I'd no talent. Just a drifter, with wants above my station and no way—no honest way—of gratifying them."

He paused, then took his gaze from the fire and let it rest on me.

"I'm trying to be honest with you. I am being honest. It wasn't only wanting things for myself. I couldn't bear her to know I was a failure—that I was cut out on a pattern bound to fail. It was partly pride, I couldn't have stood the mortification of it, but it was more than that. It was that I knew it would break her up entirely. So I kept on—on that paper. I always came down here to see her in a frock coat and a topper. She used to sit and just stroke that topper with the tips of her fingers as though it were a frightfully precious breed of Persian cat. She only lived for my visits and what I could tell her of myself. You don't know what a life of complete isolation hers is here. She has never known any of her neighbours—why, do you think? Lest my precious career should be damaged by people knowing how I started and that I had an illiterate working woman for a mother. Think of the incredible strength of her to keep to that all these years. Then I got hold of a sum of money—a few hundreds. My paper was a dishonest affair enough, but I cheated even my paper—I took the money to keep something out of it and didn't let it know. Then I cut loose from it and told myself I'd start again.

But there seemed nothing I could do. I could get no references for a clerkship or anything of that kind. And my mother kept on asking how I was getting on, when I was going to marry a lady. Then—I must have been a bit mad—I decided to have a splash on my money and see what it would do for me—a rich marriage, perhaps. Sounds low, but you see I'd got sort of used to taking everything from a woman. I went to Fengate. Everyone liked me. I'm a taking kind of fellow."

He said it bitterly, and I nodded, for it was true. There was a kind of glamour and charm about him.

"And what made you leave, plan all that sham accident affair?" I asked. "Did your money come to an end?"

"No, I've got a hundred left, though, of course, I owe practically everything there. But I got worried about my mother—I'd sent her snapshots of me out hunting and all that kind of thing from the local papers, but it was no good writing because she couldn't read it if I did. So every now and then I ran up to see her. She was taken bad once while I was here, and I made her have a doctor. It's her heart, and it can't last out for more than a month or so. So I chucked everything. I couldn't leave openly, I should have had all my creditors after me, so I thought I'd arrange it so that they'd think I was killed. I mismanaged it, owing to not knowing that little item about the tide, and there's a hue and cry after me. I should be safe enough staying here, but I find she's already—knowing about her heart—she'd made the doctor tell her the truth—she's already sold the furniture and put the place in the hands of an agent, so that I shall have as much as possible coming to me at her death,

with no need to give myself away by having to make the arrangements. She's thought even of that—she couldn't have done it more carefully if she'd known I was a guilty man trying to hide. She was going into lodgings by herself. Of course I put my foot down. Luckily I have that hundred. That'll be quite enough to last her time and impress her with my riches. She need never know, if only I'm not caught."

At that moment we heard the sound of a key in the back door, and Edgar got up to meet his mother and relieve her of the milk and buns she carried. He had certainly shown me his point of view, there was no doubt about that, and shown it so that I had no course but to aid him.

We all had tea together, and as I sat and munched I gazed at that indomitable old woman and marvelled. If I had known everything then that I did after, known what a game of cross-purposes was being played in that kitchen, I should have marvelled the more. Meanwhile, I was anxious to get away. It was past five o'clock by now, and Peter must be wondering what had become of me, he might even now be prowling round the house, a thing to be avoided at all costs. I stood up to go. I noticed that while I was making my farewells to Mrs. Murdock her son had left the room. When he entered again he came towards me.

"I must see you alone for a minute," he said, too low for his mother's ears to catch.

"See me to the gate."

"No, I'd rather not let out my secrets in the garden. Come upstairs to her room when she thinks you're gone and I'll speak to you. There's something I want you to see there."

The Milky Way

He pushed his mother gently into her chair by the dying fire, and bending over her said loudly:

"I'll see Miss Lovel off, mother. And then it's time we were toddling ourselves. You've nothing you need go upstairs again for, have you?"

"No, but there's no call for us to go till to-morrow," she protested, "we weren't starting till to-morrow."

"I've changed my mind. I don't think it's good for you to be in this damp old house a day longer. You leave everything to me. I'm in charge now."

He smiled at her, and she gave him her grim tender-in-spite-of-itself smile back again, and I took my leave. The kitchen door once shut behind us we crept silently, though owing to her extreme deafness there was no real need for caution, up the stairs, along the passage, and into a room at the far end.

"I wish to goodness my mother knew everything," he burst out, "she's such a—such a man. If only she weren't in this condition—— But I couldn't tell her, it's been going on too long. I hate all this need for—for what I'm going to do."

He was by the door as he spoke; when he finished he walked out and shut it behind him. I heard the key turn in the lock.

"Edgar! Edgar!" I cried, and running to the door, shook it violently. His voice, low and hurried, came from the other side.

"Read what I've left on the mantelpiece," he said urgently. "Don't make a noise. She'll guess everything if she hears you. But she won't. It's no good making a noise. No one'll hear you till to-morrow when the workmen pass. I—but read what I've written."

His step went away down the passage, and with a reel-

ing head I picked up the piece of paper that lay on the mantelpiece, and read as follows:—

"I'm sorry if I'm wrong, but I daren't trust you. You yourself said you were after me for your pape This'll give me time to get her away. If you reall are playing the game by us and care what happens t her you'll forgive me for this and won't let on.—E.M.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT I FOUND UNDER THE PILLOW

MY first thought was of Chloe and the dance that night at which I was somehow to protect her from Maurice Purvis. What would Jo think, but that I had basely betrayed her trust in me? I read the little note over again, and my first anger and helplessness gave way to reason. After all, there was Peter, who would free me easily enough. But I almost despaired of Edgar. It seemed that the fatal crook in him which enabled him to argue that black was white, had never been more clearly shown. He was so crooked that he could not believe in the straightness of anyone else.

I looked round the room, which, facing north-east, was already grey with shadow. The big old four-poster bed was still there, ready for Mrs. Murdock's occupation of it for one more night, otherwise the room was bare except for a chest of drawers on which were a few rough washing requisites. In default of anything better to do —for I dared not whistle for Peter till I had heard Edgar take his mother away—I pulled out the drawers. They were all empty, but the last one stuck a little, and I found that a fold of paper was wedged behind, where it had probably fallen unnoticed from the drawer above. Smoothing out the paper, I saw that it was the prospectus of a boarding-house, illustrated with photographs. I turned the paper over idly at first, then a sudden idea

flashed towards me. Was this the place where Eddie was taking his mother, and had he given her this so that she could see what it was like? Why else should it be there? I took it with me to the bed, and sat down, leaning on one hand. The hand, sliding under the edge of the pillow, touched something cold, and I drew forth a shiny-covered exercise-book such as children use at school. Wondering whatever Mrs. Murdock wanted with such a thing, I opened it. The first few pages were covered with laborious copies, in pencil, of printed characters, then came whole words done by the same slow method. At first I stared uncomprehendingly, then, as I realised, I felt the tears burn in my eyes. Mrs. Murdock had been teaching herself to write by copying print. She had evidently begun with words of which she knew the meaning by hearsay—there was a reproduction, for instance, of the notice-board outside. As she got on a little she had probably had a spelling book to help her, for there were columns of words printed one after the other. I turned on to the end of the book. There the pages were covered with disjointed scraps of writing, and slowly I made them out.

"i am getting on with my——" here came a blank, and I guessed the word "writing" had been too much for her—"but i shall never doe wat i thot be a good companen for eddie i am to old to lern."

I turned the page, realising as I did so the two reasons which had lain at the root of this attempt at self-education on the part of Mrs. Murdock. One had been the shining hope that she might fit herself to be a worthier mother to Eddie, and surprise him by her achievement, the other, probably unknown to herself, was the imperative need for self-expression. With what must have

been infinite labour she had jotted down a few sentences that revealed more than she had ever told to any living soul.

" i wish eddie cud no i no," I read. " i sumtime think it will kill me noing he is not happy an him not thinken i no."

With the back of my mind I heard the house door close behind Edgar and his mother, but I was too amazed by what I was reading to pay any heed to it.

" eddie has don sumthen dredfull," was the next entry, " an he thenk i dont no. i wish i cud tell him i no for i mite help him, but he wood not like to no i no. i hev made it out in the papers. i wish he wood not mind mi noing." Here evidently her thoughts and the passion of her had outrun her limited powers of transmission, and all that followed, written slanting-wise, as though in a gust of emotion, was:

" eddie eddie eddie."

The pencil had been driven deeply into the paper at the last repetition of her son's name. I had forgotten all about whistling for Peter, as I sat there with that pathetic journal in my hand. The thought of Edgar, with his crookedness and his great unashamed devotion to his mother, and the thought of her, unfaltering at even such a pass, absorbed me. And each thinking the other did not know—Eddie absorbed lest his mother should know her labour had been in vain, yet longing for the strength and peace that would result if she only could have, but sure that it would break her heart. She, knowing, and having known perhaps for years, and thinking he could not bear her knowledge. As I thought of it all my eyes fell again on the boarding-house prospectus. It referred to a house in Buckinghamshire—a gabled, timbered mod-

ern atrocity called "The Croft," with a tennis lawn and all comforts for invalids; the combination made me smile even then. Guests could be quite private, the prospectus said, and there was a good doctor who always attended when required. This must be the place where Edgar was taking his mother.

She had doubtless forgotten that that tell-tale book was left under her pillow—I could guess at her agony of mind when she found it was not in her luggage, that book that might give away her Eddie. Somehow I must get it to her as soon as possible, and I cast about for the best way. I could do nothing that night, because of my promise to Jo, and I did not like to trust the book in the post on the mere chance of that boarding house being the place for which Edgar and his mother were bound. The only thing I could do was to use the rest of the editor's sovereign in going down next day. As I came to this decision I heard Peter whistling the "Humoreske"—our signal—from below, and, opening the window, I called out that I was locked in and he was to let me out at once. This he did by the simple expedient of breaking the French window and getting in by it, and then, as Edgar had left the key in the lock, my door was easily opened and I walked forth.

We filled the dogs' water-bowls and divided the remainder of the buns between them and the ferrets; and then, as we went back to St. John's Wood, I told Peter all about it as well as I could, though I felt it was a difficult thing to explain to him under the circumstances. However, Peter, being nothing if not feminine, understood. We arrived back at the Hencoop in time not only for supper, but for me to assist the Changeling with the great event of the day—Littlejohn's bath. As she lay

back in it, her round head on my supporting palm and her fat knees drawn upwards, gurgling and chuckling at me, I realised more keenly than before how Mrs. Murdock must feel about Eddie, who, for her, with all his years and sins, was still after all the baby who had lain and laughed up at her. The thought of her crude self-betrayal in that attempt at a journal was with me at the back of my mind all that evening, until Chloe's affairs drove everything else away.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

CHLOE had been delighted when she heard I was to be dressed like herself—I think she saw the possibility of tantalising Maurice Purvis. Jo helped us to dress, and when we were ready we stood side by side before the long glass while she tied on our masks. We saw two figures in deep rose tulle, the short skirts powdered with black pompons standing straight out from our waists. Two long pairs of legs were attired in black silk stockings and satin slippers with scarlet heels; on our arms we wore black gloves, and round our necks huge ruffs of frothing lawn. The curves of our two chins—just visible between the ruffs and the lace hanging from the masks—were decked with a black patch apiece. On our heads Napoleonic hats with gilt tassels hanging from their points were crammed down so that no pale gold or dull mouse locks were to be seen. Chloe laid hold of me and whirled me round.

"Give me the first dance, Viv; you must! We shall look simply adorable dancing together!"

"Anything you like, if you'll let me go now. Here's poor Jo all undone down the back. Jo, you're a genius to have got yourself up like that!"

Jo was dressed as a gipsy, and the tawny silks and dangling earrings gave full value to her clear, brown skin and splendid teeth; she made Chloe and me look quite insignificant. In the daytime she is plain, for her

figure is on the big scale that looks clumsy in a shirt and short skirt, but splendid in softer garments. Her face is of the Slav type, which, with the right lighting and shadows on it, is, to my mind, the most fascinating of all—very broad across the low brow and prominent cheek bones, the mouth big and set a shade further in between the short tip-tilted nose and cup-shaped chin than is usual. It is a type in which the tameness of the even-coloured skin and muddy-brown eyes does not matter, because all the construction of the head is so sound, with every bone in its right place.

I kissed the back of her short, strong neck as I finished pinning the kerchief down, and we all three went into the studio, where Peter, got up as a pickpocket, with a teaspoon poking out from the crown of his hat and his pockets bulging with spoons and watches, was paring candle ends over the floor and rubbing them in with a foot lost in the throes of a huge carpet slipper.

Chloe took off her mask when the guests began to arrive, whispering in my ear:

"I'll put it on again after. There's someone I rather want to confuse." She broke off, and I knew, without Jo's gentle pinch of my elbow, that the villain of the piece had made his entry. He came straight across to Chloe and taking up her hand, kissed it—there was an audacity about the action that was its own excuse. Then, as he turned to Jo, he caught sight of me. I had my mask on and for a moment he looked from me to Chloe; then a light of pure enjoyment leapt into his eyes. Chloe slipped on her mask and came to stand beside me, saying demurely:

"Viv, let me introduce Mr. Purvis. My friend Miss Lovel."

Mr. Purvis bowed, his hand to his black leather coat. He was dressed as a chauffeur, and I had to admit that the plain garb suited his fair, sleek good looks remarkably well. Anyone less like the conventional villain to look at than Maurice Purvis it would have been hard to find. He was inclined to be a shade too plump, and on the boyish pink and white of his face the heavy wrinkles looked oddly out of place, while his eyes shone blue and very charming from their sagging lids. He was one of those people who on nothing but a well-cut chin and a high forehead from which the hair is brushed straight back, foreign fashion, give a decided impression of cleverness.

"No," said Chloe, in reply to his request for the first dance, "I'm having it with Miss Lovel. Come, Viv!"

I put my arm round her waist and swept her away, leaving Mr. Purvis rather sulkily dangling his programme.

If it had not been for my anxiety about Mrs. Murdock and Chloe I should have enjoyed that evening. Jo, Peter and I had to take it in turns at the piano, but he and I always danced together when she was playing, and all my other partners were good. Mr. Purvis claimed me for a waltz under the impression that I was Chloe, but I answered him in my natural voice to undeceive him. It would make my imitation of Chloe's tones the more convincing if I should have to try it.

It must have been just before midnight—for the order to unmask had not yet come—when Jo, Chloe, and two other girls who had been practising it with them during the week, formed all the guests in lines behind them for the lighted torch dance. Everyone was provided with a "torch" of sorts, mostly candles in half-bottles, which

make excellent draught-proof holders, some with Chinese lanterns. For the first three figures the processions kept themselves unmixed and turned in and out, waving their lights and shouting, then all became a scene of wild confusion, each person stamping, yelling, and rushing about; every now and then came a crash of breaking glass as something was swept down by the stampede, the floor shook and swayed, and little gusts of flame, soon danced out, sprang up here and there where a lantern had swung from its owner's grasp. I rattled away energetically at the piano, and almost felt I had the best of it, for from the piled height of two model-thrones, where I and my instrument were perched, the whole affair looked splendid, a living medley of lights and streaming colours like some bright Bacchanalian orgy. I caught sight of Peter, whose lantern had gone out, squishing it to and fro like a concertina as he pranced along, from his mouth four lighted cigarettes spread out fanwise. Groups of three or four people linked arm-in-arm went swinging round, kicking wildly and giving short high "whoops," while others, with a more deadly ingenuity, were aiming chocolates down the yawning jaws of the gramophone—which, I may mention in passing, has never been the same bright young creature since.

After these energetic efforts, comparative peace reigned while the dancers sat round on the floor in circles and began on the supper. I was tired after my long spell of playing, and also, to tell the truth, excessively sleepy, for I was beginning to feel the strain that the day had been. I refused Jo's and Peter's invitation to join them at their supper circle, because I saw Chloe and Mr. Purvis had slipped away out of the studio during the confusion. I went out to the head of the ladder-like stairs

that led down from the Hencoop into a confusion of harness and stable appurtenances. The Chinese lanterns had burned themselves out and the place was in darkness except for the moonlight that shone in through the open top-half of the door below. I sat down on some sacks that had been comfortably arranged by the head of the stairs and taking off my mask, fanned my hot face with it. At that moment I heard Chloe's voice from the foot of the ladder, and her first words robbed me of any scruple in listening.

"Oh, Maurice, I can't come—I daren't," she said, and there was a thrill of excitement and longing in her hushed voice.

"My dear child, why ever not? Can't I take my little friend Chloe for a spin in the moonlight without any harm? Just down to Kew to see the moon on the river and then back again—we should only be gone an hour or so. They won't break up here till four or five, we should be back before then. We can go just as we are, masks and all, and pretend we're highwaymen. Say yes, Chloe!"

"Suppose we had a break-down?" objected Chloe.

"We couldn't have. I've heaps of petrol and the car's running like a bird. I thought you'd enjoy it."

"So I should. But——"

"But what? Chloe, won't you think of me for once? Just because I can't have—what I want, mayn't I have anything at all? Little Chloe, why are you afraid of our friendship? Something tells you it mayn't be quite that—on my side? Perhaps not—a man's a man, Chloe, but mayn't you be all the more sure since there is that 'something else' in my thoughts of you, that I wouldn't do anything to hurt or vex you?"

The Milky Way

"Oh, you horrid, mean, clever man!" breathed I the darkness.

"But—what would Jo and Viv say?" murmur Chloe.

"Miss Nash would be so pleased to see you comi back all the better for the fresh air that she wouldr say anything. As for your little friend 'Viv'—is s as puritanical as she looks?"

"Viv? Oh, no—but she's odd. I mean she'd nev think any harm of me, but she'd be furious with you."

"I think I can survive it," replied Mr. Purvis wi a little laugh, and I swore to have his blood.

There was a slight rustle at the foot of the stairs the two conspirators stood up, and I prepared to fly.

"In five minutes, then. I'll have the car just outsi the yard gate, I'll run her out while the music's going said Mr. Purvis, and I heard Chloe's voice, quite car free by now, reply "Right-O!"

I ran into Jo's and Chloe's room and stood thinki for a moment. Should I tell Chloe I had heard? T Jo? Speak to Maurice Purvis himself? Chloe wou probably turn obstinate, and Jo and I could hardly lo her up. As these thoughts flew through my head caught sight of a cluster of golden curls lying on t dressing table and an idea came to me. They we Chloe's curls—in fact, they had once grown on her hea and were the result of a year's "combings," saved up a pink shoe bag and then confided to the tender ca of a hairdresser. Chloe had not needed them to-nig under the Napoleonic hat, and when I had locked t bedroom door I seized them and pinned them on behi one ear, pulling them forward so that they lay on r shoulder as though they had "come down." Then I su

stituted for my cocked hat a blue motor-bonnet, swathed in masses of blue-grey chiffon, that I knew belonged to Chloe, and tying on my mask again I slipped on the big fur coat Jo and Chloe shared between them. As I did so, I caught sight of Mrs. Murdock's book on the ottoman; I must have put it down there when I came straight into Jo's room on my return. Nothing would be more natural than for any one of our guests, who left their cloaks there, to glance into it, and, shocked at my own carelessness, I stuffed it into the pocket of the fur coat. I was ready, but at that moment the door handle was first turned, then vigorously rattled. "Who's there?" I called.

"Oh—bother!" said a voice—Chloe's.

"What d'you want?" I asked.

"I want to come in. What are you doing?"

"Me? Oh—I'm lying down. I've got a headache. D'you want me?"

"No—I want to get at some things of mine."

"Can I find them for you?"

"Er—no—you wouldn't know where they are. If you've a headache hadn't you better lie down in your own room? It's quieter."

"I suppose it is. Oh, Chloe, will you just find Peter and tell him I can't play any more to-night? There's an angel."

I waited till her footsteps died away, then, turning out the lamp and putting the matches in my pocket to delay her yet further, I crept down the ladder. Across the yard I ran, keeping in the shadow of the house, and at the gate I found the car and Maurice Purvis.

"Good girl," he said, "you're under the five minutes."

"Quick!" I muttered, apparently very out of breath

as I took my place in the car—a low grey touring car, with a torpedo body and bucket seats. With a throb of relief I saw by her steeply-angled bonnet that she was a "Flag," the one make of car with which I am thoroughly at home, and the discovery made me feel less powerless. As Maurice Purvis tucked the rug in round me I leaned a little forward so that the fair curls caught the light from a street lamp. He touched them gently.

"Golden locks!" he said.

"Idiot!" I thought, but all I did was to draw back petulantly, as I knew Chloe would have done—for I was sure Maurice Purvis had never touched her like that before—this was what her consent to his plan was already bringing to pass. He laughed a little, then took his place beside me, and I said to myself, as I saw the movement of his foot that started us, that I might have cause to be glad that this car was fitted with a self-starting device. We were off—down the still road, where moonlight and lamplight mingled together and shadows of varying degrees of darkness and semi-transparency lay across each other; under each lamp the shadow of its own framework looked like a great motionless spider on the pavement. We swung round the corner and I leant back and drew a deep sigh of relief.

"Glad to get away unchallenged!" said my companion with a touch of triumph, very naturally misinterpreting the nature of my relief. I looked away from him and drew myself up a little as though a trifle offended, and he was quick to take his cue.

"I won't bother you with talk, Chloe, if you'd rather not. We'll just enjoy the moonlight and pretend things, and you shall tell me you're glad you came when you see the river. Will you, do you think, Chloe?"

I gave a very good imitation of a gurgling sound with which Chloe expresses pleased agreement, and we sped on. I admit that if it had not been for worrying I should have enjoyed the ride very much, for in that clear night air, with the clean rush of it in one's face, Maurice Purvis became a mere figure-head whose existence it would have been easy to forget. But I was somewhat perturbed, because though it is easy enough to take one's own adventures in a happy-go-lucky way—in fact, that's the only way to take them—one can't extend the same carelessness to other people's affairs. Also, I hate meddling in business where I don't belong to be. Giving advice is bad enough, but when it came to doing things for a person without her knowledge or permission I confess I didn't like it at all. And if it transpired that Mr. Purvis really had no idea in his head beyond an innocent run to Kew and back Chloe would quite justly be angry with me for having made a fool of her. Yet—suppose there were more to it than that? Of deliberate badness I didn't suspect Maurice Purvis, because men as a rule don't want to land themselves in a difficult position, but suppose, with Chloe once under his care, he lost his head and grew reckless? It would mean a terrible fright for Chloe, if not a silly scandal, which the knowledge Jo and I had of her innocence would not allay. It seemed to me I had done right, but by now I was almost too tired to think, and when, once past Shepherd's Bush we had the road to ourselves and the car ate it up at well over the legal speed, I lay back in drowsy silence. Past Turnham Green, where the church, so curiously thin in quality by day, as though made of pasteboard, attained a certain kind of Christmas-card effectiveness in the moonlight; past the ugly basemented houses, past still

unbuilt-on nursery gardens and glass houses that glimmered like water, and then—past Kew Bridge, leaving it on our left. I touched Maurice Purvis' arm in protest, but he only put his foot on the accelerator.

"We may just as well go on for a bit this way," he said in my ear; "we've taken less time than I thought we should, and it's a ripping run once through Brentford. We'll go round by Twickenham and Hampton Court and home through Richmond and Kew."

I sat back again, helpless rage in my heart, and we ran through the narrow High Street of Brentford, where the air was laden with gas and the huge gasometers loomed up darkly through the night; every now and then we passed a gap in the houses on our left, and caught a glimpse of sparkling river with beds of rushes standing up into the moonlight, or willow branches drooping greyly. We rushed on, over the canal bridges, just catching a glimpse of the great flat barges moored side by side, on and on we went, past Syon House, the lion's straightly stuck-out tail looking more unyielding than ever, and then we came to Busch Corner, and, to my intense relief, swung round it. My vague anxiety allayed, I let myself give way to the sleepiness that was growing stronger and stronger. It was a mere film of sleep at first, through which I was conscious of outward things—of the great blocks of Isleworth Infirmary and more ranks of glass-houses—then my head nodded lower and lower, and—I slept. We were running through open country and the dark glimmer of early dawn when I awoke.

For the first moment or so I remembered nothing, and thought how pleasant it was to wake up in that rush of

air and with trees and sky around; then, as it all crowded back to me, I cried out in anger.

"Oh, what are you doing? Where are we going? I cried.

"On—and on!" he replied, laughing, but there wa a tenseness in his voice. "Chloe, little Chloe, when w started I did mean to take you back—but I can' Where are we going? To the moon, to the edge of th

CHAPTER XVIII

FIRST MAURICE AND THEN EDGAR

NEVER have I seen a man so taken aback as Maurice Purvis. The car swerved across the road and nearly took liberties with a gatepost before he brought it into the straight again. Then he leant over and tugged at the golden ringlets, which came away in his hand. At the sight of Chloe's curls in his hold I lost my temper, and snatching them from him stuffed them into my pocket.

"That belongs to Chloe, and nothing of hers has anything to do with you," I said. "Now, if you please, turn the car and take me straight back again."

"I'm damned if I do!" said Mr. Purvis.

"Oh, Viv, you have been and gone and done it this time," I thought, and the car ran on, but at a slackening pace. Presently a peculiar smell began to greet my nostrils, it grew stronger, and blue fumes wreathed up in our faces. We slowed down and then came to a standstill, and while I sat and looked on, as though I did not know one end of a car from the other, Maurice Purvis opened the bonnet and gazed despairingly in. As I guessed, and soon knew from his annoyed comments, there was no water left in the radiator, and when he looked round despairingly, I came to his help with a suggestion.

"If it is water you need, I think there's a stream over

there," I said coldly, pointing to where a ranker growth of grass was visible at the far end of a field sloping away from the road.

Then began the pilgrimages of Mr. Purvis. He went back and forth, back and forth, between the stream and the car; while I, having dismounted, sat in the hedge and made no offer to help. Soon he flung his coat and cap into the car, at last he paused to rest. He also sat down in the hedge, and we looked at each other.

I was gleefully conscious that I was not looking my best. I had taken off my bonnet and my hair was flat and blown about, and if I looked as pale as I felt, which I probably did in the dawnlight and a pink frock, the result must have been unprepossessing. My white ruff, very crumpled, had worked up under one ear, and I afterwards discovered that my patch had come off and left a dirty mark on my chin. Hands in pockets, I met the gaze of Mr. Purvis' disgusted blue eyes with severity. He was even more like the morning after the night before than I, for his lids were red and puffy, and he looked unhealthy, which I never have done in my life. One lock of fair hair clung desperately to his brow, robbing him of his quasi-intellectual air, and he was pale with temper.

For a long moment we sat in silence, then indignation gave me words.

"Oh, aren't you ashamed to be you?" I flared out. "When I think that I might have been Chloe, I—I—"

"I think you took a great deal on yourself when you did what you did, Miss Lovel," he retorted.

"You were taking rather more, weren't you?"

"Not without the consent of the other party."

"That's not true! You know quite well that if

Chloe'd known you meant this—she'd never have said yes."

"I didn't mean this—then," he said, flushing a little.

"Very likely not, but it's because I knew it might turn to this that I came instead."

He stared at me with greater interest than he had shown before. Then:

"You little devil!" he said, with a soft whistle, and: "I beg your pardon, believe me it slipped out more in admiration than in any wish to be rude."

"I think I would rather have rudeness than admiration from you under the circumstances, Mr. Purvis."

He looked at me again, and this time something leapt to life between his jaded lids. He ran his fingers through his hair and settled his shoulders with a little backward movement.

"At least I have not run away with anyone dull," he remarked. "I rather thought when I saw you that there was something behind that nun-like look in your big, grey eyes. Rather *beauté du diable*—has no one ever told you so?"

The man was incorrigible—he could flirt, breakfastless, in the pallor of the dawn and a damp hedge. He went on:

"I shouldn't be surprised, you apparently wise little Folly, if you hadn't a cloven hoof tucked away in your satin slipper. If you have it's a faun's hoof, nothing worse than that. Or am I the goat foot, and you a nymph?"

"I have not the smallest intention of flirting with you. Are you going to take me back?"

"What will you give me if I do? A kiss? You needn't look so furious or so frightened—yes, you're

evidently a cross between a nymph and a nun, and not a Folly at all. But you might try to be just. Only think what a perfect thing we could make this chance day in a strange county—what a romantic snatched-from-the-lap-of-gods kind of thing. If I give all that up I might have some little reward, mightn't I?"

He had hit on the point that hurt me in the adventure—that it might, had things been otherwise, have been so perfect. If it had been Peter who had taken this freakish flight away from the town with me! What a day of cool grass and sweet sun, of milk and new bread, of streams wherein to paddle and trees whereon to climb, it would have been! Still, it was hardly fair to blame Mr. Purvis for not being the person I wanted, considering I was not the one he had wished for either. I gave him one last chance in an appeal to his nicer side, which I presumed he kept concealed somewhere.

"Mr. Purvis," said I, "I believe, when you have thought it all over, you'll be glad you haven't got Chloe into this scrape. Only think of the harm it would have done her. If you have any fondness for her you'd be sorry for that. And—will you do the decent thing and take me back?"

For a moment he hesitated, then temper gained the day.

"No, I won't," he said.

I had given him his chance, now I hardened my heart against him. If he had behaved decently I would have made up the quarrel as man to man, now I determined to have no pity. My plan was a risky one, and I began to put it into execution.

"Well, if you won't," I said, shrugging my shoulders, "there's no more to be said. But as I suppose you

don't mean to remain here, hadn't you better go on filling up that tank thing?"

"Once more'll do it," he returned, appeased by my apparent nonchalance, "and then we'll be in to Gloucester for breakfast." He picked up his can and set off down the field as he spoke, having shot a glance at me to see the effect of his last words.

I waited till he was at the further end of the sloping field, then I wandered up to the car, and with my back to him screwed on the top of the radiator; then, thankful I had not to draw attention to my proceedings by winding a handle, I jumped into the car and started her. The danger lay in turning. At the sound of the engine he looked round and stood transfixed for a moment while I backed the car into the hedge, then he began to run. He was half way up the field as I got her going forwards, and by the time her head was round he was scrambling up the hedge, but as he flung himself over it I was off down the road, and never looked back till the speedometer was marking thirty-five, and then Maurice Purvis was a small dot in the distance.

Oh, that drive! I fled along the clean morning roads across the shortening shadows, with the lovely engine purring before me and the tug of the wheel at my hands. Sometimes I ran through lanes where the cobwebs on the brambles hung like little sacks full of dew; sometimes I passed fields where the silvery ribbons of newmown hay lay across the greener stubble; or I dropped down hill roads that lay between great beech copses, where the unripe nuts showed a vivid emerald, and last year's leaves made a coppery carpet that the flecks of the sun turned to fire. Through sleepy Abingdon, with its quiet-faced Georgian houses shuttered to the dawn,

through ugly little Oxfordshire villages with their box-like buildings of new brick, and so into Bucks, often, as I found by after-study of the map, losing my way rather, but by one, at least, of these digressions I was the richer, for I went through a patch of good chalk country, where the white and shining soil was quarried in smooth great flanks overhanging the road on one side and dropping away, half-veiled with a copse of young saplings, on the other. On the chalk the little shadow of every blade and pebble lay soft and blue, and the sunlight refracted off each pearly surface. And always, as I went, my heart sang with pleasure at this way which had befallen me, so to speak, of killing the proverbial two birds with one motor car. For instead of going straight home, I would use Maurice Purvis' car to take me to "The Croft," and see if my guess as to its being the destination of the Murdocks was justified. Presently I came to the sign-post I sought, and then, running through a trim, rather villa-ish street, I saw a large white gate with "The Croft" painted on it standing invitingly open.

Somehow, as I saw the smoke beginning to rise up from the house I sought, I had no doubt that Mrs. Murdock and her son were there, and that all would yet be as well as it could be, considering. And I was right.

Edgar had hired a luxurious motor and driven his mother gently down on the preceding evening. I saw him alone, told him what I thought of him for his behaviour to me, and then handed him his mother's exercise book. I went out into the garden, through the long window, while he read it.

When I came back the room was empty, but presently a maid-servant came and asked me to step upstairs.

She showed me the room and I went in, after a quick rap. Edgar Murdock, *alias* Mr. Murford, was kneeling on the floor with his head on his mother's lap, and his false beard lay beside him on the carpet.

She, the wonderful old woman, had as little sentiment as ever. She bade him put on his beard again for safety's sake, as an ordinary mother may bid her child wear a red flannel chest-protector; but something of the expression which she generally kept for him only was in her eyes as she looked at me. She permitted herself to kiss me, then apologised for taking liberties out of her station.

We all had breakfast together in Mrs. Murdock's room, because of the peculiarity of my attire when the fur coat was discarded, and then, feeling a new man, I started for home.

Soon I came to Gerrard's Cross and the curse of the week-end cottage, and thus into London by a route I well knew: through Uxbridge and Hillingdon, and then through Hanwell, where I caught a glimpse of "Haggett's Imperial Theatre," from the far-end of the bit of waste land. And so—as Pepys would say—to St. John's Wood, where I arrived with the mid-day milk. I had changed, the better to escape observation, into Mr. Purvis' coat and cap, and it was thus attired I burst upon the anxious gaze of Jo and Peter, who were standing on the Hencoop steps. I took off the cap and waved it at them, when I had brought the car to a standstill in the yard.

"Viv! Thank Heaven!" cried Jo, and Peter was at the step lifting me out. I was so tired, I staggered against him, and he caught me by the ruff.

"What have you done with Maurice Purvis?" cried Jo, as nearly hysterical as I have ever seen her.

"He is in a hedge at the far end of Oxfordshire. Jo, for goodness' sake, don't expect me to talk. Put me to bed."

Peter half carried me upstairs, and made some milk hot for me in the studio, while Jo took off my strange medley of clothes, and I slept till tea-time. Then I joined Jo and Peter, and told them all about it, and they told me what had happened in my absence. Chloe, not unnaturally, had at first proclaimed me a spoil-sport, and defended herself against Jo's horror when she heard of the scheme. Then, when the hours went on and we did not come back, she grew uneasy, and began to think I had had cause for my interference. Jo, roused at last, had now packed her off to relations in the country for a week, in which she was to play with nice boy-cousins, and forget Maurice Purvis. That gentleman had not yet appeared to claim his car—and, indeed, he only sent his chauffeur for it next day—but, by all reports, he was an oddly chastened man for some time to come, and left the inmates of the Hencoop alone. As to Chloe, I think it was not so very many weeks after that Jo said something about hoping she "didn't miss Maurice Purvis?" "Maurice?" said Chloe, with a stare of absolutely unfeigned innocence, "why should I? He's rather boring if you see too much of him. Jo, I wish you'd lend me your new veil—Mr.——" and here she named, whoever the youth of the moment chanced to be—"is coming to take me to the R.A." And the youth in question, being one of the eminently harmless creatures usually indulged in by Chloe, I don't doubt Jo lent her the

veil, and thanked Heaven for her peculiarly elastic temperament. On this evening at the Hencoop that was yet in the future—though a knowledge of our Chloe helped us to forecast it—what we talked about chiefly was Mrs. Murdock and her son.

"Oh, I do hope it'll be all right!" I said; "that no one'll find out, and Mrs. Murdock can die there happily. And then Edgar'll be able to put things right and pay what he owes, for there's four and a half acres to Secrecy Farm, and land there is at £750 an acre."

"One comfort is, he'll have to pay his debts, as you have the whip hand of him," said Peter. "But I doubt his ever running straight. By the way, we owe the editor of the *Weekly Drum* that sovereign."

"I know. I feel the time has come to pawn the watch."

So we disposed of what we thought was a mere episode, and finished at that, little guessing how I was to hear of Edgar Murdock again.

That night, when Peter stood up to go, suddenly he burst out laughing.

"By Jove, Viv!" he said, "I believe you've done what is called 'compounding a felony!'"

CHAPTER XIX

MY FOUR HOUSES

TWO days later I went down to Cornwall. Since the only way towards journalism that had been open for me was now closed, and since I could not go on living on Jo any longer, there seemed nothing else to be done, and the letter from Evadne Culver saying they were "out" of a model seemed providential. Chloe was expected back in a few days. Emily and Littlejohn I had perforce to leave behind, and Peter also was staying in town, therefore it was entirely on my own that I embarked on the profession of model—"head and hands, and perhaps a little foot or so," as Jo expressed it. My memories of Evadne Culver and her brother Ted were a trifle sketchy, as in Paris, when we had all been studying at Collarossi's together, they had never seemed to "count." In other words, they had not been "in our set," which was young, eager, foolish, very earnest, and very irresponsible. Ted and Evadne represented the type of which, for some perversity, the men are long-haired and the women wear their locks cut short; a type that really died somewhere in the 'seventies, and only survives, save for a few isolated exceptions like the Culvers, in the imagination of the British public. And now, apparently, having gathered together a few other choice souls, Ted and Evadne were doing a series of what they called "Nature Vibration" pictures at Land's End.

The Milky Way

"I hope they won't paint very vibratory pictures of me," I remarked to Peter, who was seeing me off at Paddington; "it would make me feel so like a cinematograph film. Oh, Peter, I do hope you and the Changeling and Littlejohn will be all right. I wish we had some idea of what you are going to do next. I wish I weren't going."

"What—not though it's to the country?"

"Oh, well—the *country!*" And despite myself, I felt a beam of joy spreading over my countenance and the light on Peter's dying away before it. I have always wished I had my face more in hand. "Oh, there's the whistle, and the guard's losing control over his little green flag," I said. "Peter, good-bye, and mind you write and tell me when you get anything to do."

"By the three balls of my uncle I swear it. I say, Viv——" but the train bore me away too fast for his running feet.

By the time Saltash was reached the fine weather had turned to "misting," but my soul felt the old up-leaping at the crossing of the Tamar, and as the splendidly desolate country, with its deserted mine shafts stark against the swollen clouds, opened out before me with that fan-like movement which is the effect of the foreground slipping past more rapidly than the distance, I went into the corridor to be more alone with my pleasure. And, at last, just upon five in the afternoon, I saw again the glimmering marshes of Marazion, saw the misty Mount—a fairy castle on a phantom hill—and heard the rush of the high tide as it surged up, on my left, its creaming edge almost to the railway track. A minute more, and the train ran in under the glass roof of Penzance station, and I saw Evadne Culver

awaiting me on the platform, very much as I remembered her—dark, eager, and decided-looking, and wearing a pince-nez attached to a black silk ribbon.

When, our greetings over and my scanty luggage found, we were driving along in the high market gig, Evadne told me about the Nature-Vibrationists.

"People must learn to see that it's the spirit that matters," she announced. "I suppose you still stick to the old way of trying to express what you see before you? We think it more important to paint the inner meaning of the thing seen, in such a way that the colour waves will arrive in their right shape to the person who looks at the picture. We must convert you. Of course, you are not to tire yourself out posing; you must paint when you want to."

This was very good of Evadne, for it meant I should be able to do a series of little sketches that with any luck I might sell when I was back in town, and I thanked her warmly.

"There's only one thing troubling me," said Evadne, "and that's where you're to sleep. Our cottage is full, and all the farmhouse lodgings are let this time of year. So—I do hope you won't mind—we've put up a bed in four empty houses for you."

"In four! But, my dear Evadne——"

"Oh, well, it's four cottages that have been knocked into one and are standing empty. It's Clownance. D'you know it?"

Did I know it? It was our old family place, the small but adorable manor of Lovel, or Levelis, as the name had originally been. It had long passed out of our empty hands, and the present owner, a rich grocer from Truro, had turned it into four tenement cottages.

A painter had then taken them and knocked a hole in each of the dividing walls that had been put up inside. Now he, too, had left, and Evadne had placed the necessaries of life in the room I was to have.

After supper with the Culvers at their cottage I departed to my four houses, escorted by Ted bearing a lantern that the last quarter of the July moon made futile. It had quite left off misting, and the air was soft as milk. Clownance lies on a plateau half way up the hill that slopes from the seaward valley, within five minutes of the Culvers' house. Ted and I walked up the rutted cart-track, where the moon, shining through the elms and sycamores, made a marbled pattern, and shone on the white-washed lintel of the house itself, at one side of whose grey granite front showed the ruins of the banqueting hall, delicate pointed arches and carved capitals standing up pale and clear-cut in the moonlight. I fitted the rusty key into the lock of the big nail-studded door—a superfluous action, since it was not locked, owing to constitutional defects. I then lifted the latch instead and opened the door.

"You're sure you're not nervous?" asked Ted, as he took farewell of me in the dark doorway, the glare from the lantern shining on his long throat with its tremulous Adam's apple, and on his retreating chin and big, amiable mouth. Only across the upper part of his face lay a bar of shadow, so that he seemed to be wearing a mask, from which the lenses of his pince-nez gleamed anxiously forth.

"Not in the least," I answered, "and I shall expect 'Senath at seven with my hot water." For it was arranged that the Culvers' little maid was to call me with

my bath water, which she was to bear from their house to mine.

Ted said good-night and departed, and I went all over the house of my ancestors, lantern in hand, and up all three flights of modern deal stairs and the one old one of stone where each step was worn crescent-wise. It was quite a small house, and its charm lay in the fact that it was like a reproduction in miniature of a lordly mansion, being built round a little square cobbled courtyard, guarded by a granite gateway with a big stone ball on either post. The windows were deep-set in heavy mullions, and here and there a pane of bottle glass showed like a round, watery eye. The only furniture in the house consisted of a kettle that lay sideways, gaping at me, by the soft pile of feathery ash on the hearthstone of the hall; and the things Evadne had placed in my room—a narrow bed that stood island-like in the middle of the bare boards on which a pale bright square of moonlight was the only carpet, and a washstand surmounted by a disconcerting dimpled mirror. Below my window the evening primroses and fuchsias stood erect in what seemed palpably silver air, and the shadows clung together under the tangled stems. There was not a sound to be heard beyond the whirring of an insistent cricket from without and the occasional scamper of the rats over the beamed ceiling; while the absolute aloneness was as perfect as I had thought it would be. I felt too happy to go to bed at once, and when I was undressed I took my candle down into the hall again to say good-night to a certain little lady in pearl-coloured satin.

She lived in a sunk panel over the mantel-piece, which

was doubtless the reason why she had been left there undisturbed; had she been in a movable frame she would, despite her lack of any particular intrinsic value, have been despatched long ago to a sale-room by the aforementioned grocer. As matters were, she still graced the lonely hall and gazed down with that eternal little half-mocking smile of hers at her descendant. I had, of course, greeted her on my entry, but nevertheless I now felt drawn down to her once more. I remembered her very well from a former visit, when Father had taken me by the shoulders and stood me beneath her, looking from one to the other of us. "By Jove! Except that your hair's darker, you might be a re-incarnation, Viv," he had said, and indeed the likeness was so strong I could see it myself. Instead of my dull, mouse-coloured hair, she had pale, flaxen locks which she wore in little flat rings that looked as though they had been damped and then pressed round her forehead. Her small, pale face with its squareness at the level of the jaw, and its sharp pointing to the short chin, was I knew, like mine; so were the round nondescript grey eyes under brows as straight as though they had been drawn with a ruler; so was the funny little nose that was far from being straight at all. She wore a string of pearls round her small throat, and her frock, of pearl-coloured satin, slipping off one thin, childish shoulder, was kept up by a modest beringed hand poised against a knot of blue ribbon at her breast. The painting was dry and uninspired in manner, and yet the artist had caught that something which gives life to a picture—some hint of the eternal pathos of the young sitter who will be dust and ashes so many hundred years before the painted presentment has ceased to stare, with the curious, inward gaze that

portraits have, from the darkening canvas. I stayed and talked with her a little, silently, before a sudden yawn on my part sent me up the stairs to my room again, and even there I felt her friendly little presence following me. With her I soon fell into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT I TOLD THE ACANTHUS LEAF

I WAS awakened by a strange feeling that the pearly lady's presence had fled before other and more tangible ones. The moon had set and it still wanted a couple of hours to dawn. I lit my candle and slipped out of bed and into a big coat; then I opened my door and listened. A murmur of voices seemed to come from below, and I crept downstairs, lantern in hand, and into the square, stone-paved hall. The first thing I saw was a man in convict's dress bending over the hearth. With a startled exclamation he turned, and the lighted match in his hand lit up his face. I shall never forget my surprise when I recognised William Penrose.

William Penrose was the largest landowner thereabouts and lived at Boscarn with his mother; Father and I had often stayed with them; the last time, shortly before Father died, was when I was a long-legged creature of fifteen and William a staid, important youth of twenty-two. Therefore he must now be twenty-eight, but he looked very much the same. He had been a neat, correct-looking boy, and such was the atmosphere of neatness and correctness he bore with him that it made me for a moment forget the broad arrows decorating his person. One could picture him grown portly, in a tweed knickerbocker suit at just the right stage of

shabbiness and fawn-coloured spats, his fair moustache gone white and a trifle fierce, striding across stubble fields. I stood and stared at him, and he stared at me with his pale blue, rather prominent eyes. I too, in peach-bloom pyjamas and a blanket-coat, with my straight hair raining down over my shoulders, must have looked somewhat odd.

"Why, Wil——Mr. Penrose!" I said. "Don't you remember me? I'm Vivien Lovel."

"Vivien Lovel! Remember you! Why, of course. Only—well, I didn't know anyone was living here and I thought you must be a ghost—" here he glanced down at himself and broke into a laugh—"and you, I suppose, must have thought I was fleeing from justice. But I must introduce you——" and he turned to a shadowy form which I now saw for the first time sitting on the floor by the wall.

I advanced my candle and saw what, to my first bewilderment, seemed to be the little pearl-coloured lady from the wall—there were the same wide eyes, though brown instead of grey, and small pathetic face, the same shimmer of satin gown; but then I saw that the hair arranged in little clinging ringlets like those in the picture, was brown instead of flaxen, and there was that subtle air of modernity which always pervades the copy of antiquity.

"Miss Clarissa Lenine, Miss Lovel," said William, who never forgot the courtesies of life. I had often heard of Clarissa Lenine, commonly called Kissa, the daughter of a neighbouring vicar, but whenever I had been at Boscarn she had always been away at school. I was pleased to meet her at last, and said so.

"How d'you do?" answered a forlorn voice, as a

cold little hand slid into mine. "Oh, what are we to do? Isn't it dreadful?"

"Well, you see," said I, "I don't know what it's all about yet."

"Of course not. What an idiot I am!" cried William. "It's this way. I've been taking part in some beastly theatricals, and then there was a fancy dress dance after, and then I said I'd drive Miss Lenine and the doctor and his wife home in my dog-cart. It's all on my way. We dropped the other two all right, and then the mare elected to go lame, and we had to get out and walk. I thought I'd put the mare in the empty stable here for the night, and Kissa must needs slip on a rut and sprain her ankle. And I don't know what to do. It's two miles still to the vicarage and three to my place. But now you're here it's all right. You'll look after her while I go on and tell her people, and I can send over for the mare and her in the morning."

"Dear me," thought I, "it's plain to see you two were practically brought up together and haven't got over it yet." Aloud, I said: "I'd better look at the ankle first, in case it needs a doctor. You had better carry her up to my room. I'll lead the way."

We processed solemnly upstairs, and there I made a cold water compress for the ankle, which proved, although swollen and painful, to be merely strained. Then I accompanied William to the front door. He stood looking at me for a moment, still embarrassed by my attire, though he had forgotten his own.

"D'you mean to say you're all alone in this house?" he asked.

"Yes. There were no lodgings to be had. I'm posing

to the Culvers. You know them, don't you? You've let them a cottage."

"Oh, yes, I know them," he said, chuckling, as if the thought of them amused him. "Jolly good of you to sit for them," he added. And, already, in his tone was a shade of disapproval. I was Viv Lovel, a friend of his mother's, with whom I had often stayed—why should I be so much too kind as to pose for the Culvers?

"Oh, no, it's good of them, not me," I replied quickly, "they pay me. I'm here as a professional model."

"That must be stopped, of course. You must come and stay with us," said William, decidedly. A flush had actually risen to his face, and I could (metaphorically) have fallen on his neck and embraced him. I had so long been with people who thought of me, as a matter of course, as a worker, and now I felt again my kinship with William Penrose and his kind. Dull, boring, as I might find them for long at a time—as my father had before me—yet these were my people, not the Culvers of this world. As I refused his suggestion, I was aware of a glow of pleasure.

"My mother will call on you at once," said William, sticking his jaw out.

"I'm afraid I'm not very callable-on," I answered. "I only sleep here, you see. But I'll come and see her, if I may."

"Do," said William. "She often talks of you and Mr. Lovel. I—I'm awfully sorry—about your father, I mean. I had an enormous admiration for him, you know. When I was a boy, I thought him the cleverest man I'd ever met, and do still, though I'm not a bit clever myself, you know. I'm awfully glad to have met you again."

ghost-pig—was lying among a rubble of fallen stones and nettles inside the chapel; I shot a pebble at her, and she lumbered angrily past me, snorting as she went. I climbed up what was left of the stairway in the banqueting hall, and, crawling along the edge of the wall, sat down, my legs dangling and one arm clasped for security round the pointed arch of the doorway.

Away from me, the hillside sloped to the valley bed; among the brambles and gorse bushes, pockets of water glimmered pearl-like; at the mouth of the valley, about a mile to the left, the dawn was kindling over the brightening sea. I was perched so high that the dark bosses of tree-tops showed as islands above the golden mist that filled the valley in rolling clouds like smoke; the birds began to chirp, and from the hedge just below a yellow-hammer sat bowing at me and uttering his run of melancholy notes. A rabbit, its dun fur matted into little points with dew, ran across the path; the cows, scrambling up from the places they had kept dry with their own bodies, tore at the long grass till such time as the farm lads should come and drive them to the milking.

Sitting there, I remembered when Father and I, long ago, had made a pilgrimage to Clownance, how he had shown me that the iron field-gates were swung between carved pillars that had once graced the chapel, and how the windspar course of an old gable was built into the pig-sties. "If my grandfather had stuck to farming down West instead of going to races up country, this would be mine now and yours after me," he had said. "I daresay I shouldn't have stayed in it, but the rolling stone would have liked a parent wall to roll back to in its old age." As I thought of his words I understood

them far better than I had at the time, and I too felt some influences from the old place tugging at my heart. I was very happy sitting there, but there was more to it than that. It was the fact that this was my own place, where my own people had lived before me, that tingled through me like wine. That someone else was in legal possession was really neither here nor there; these stones could never be flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone as they were of mine. Not for him would the pearly lady shimmer at the bend of the stairs, rustle in the passages and fill the house with a presence as sweet and elusive as the scent of dried lavender. As I felt the call of the place, that imperative demand for actual stone and soil of one's own, which is a thing one can only understand if it is born in one, I vowed to buy Clownance back again some day. True, I had only about a pound in the world at the moment, but who could tell what might not happen? Before I swung myself down to go and meet the water-bearing 'Senath, I laid my cheek against the curve of the cold arch and whispered my vow into the ear of the acanthus leaf on the capital.

CHAPTER XXI

SPELLS

IT was a busy day which followed. I restored Kissa to her parents in the morning, posed for several hours after lunch, and then was tracked down by Mrs. Penrose in her old-fashioned little victoria, and borne off to tea. Mrs. Penrose is absurdly like William, with the same slightly sandy hair, in her case flecked with white, and the same fresh, wholesome colour. Being the dearest, kindest, most dogmatic and conventional person on earth, her horror at my situation was great, and I softened as much as possible the recital of my adventures since I had been alone in the world.

"Who would have thought your father would have muddled his affairs so?" she exclaimed. "You needn't flush up so, my dear, I don't mean anything against him. Only he was an unworldly babe, that's all he was, and you're just such another. You need a man to take care of you and protect you, my dear. William was saying so this morning."

"The dickens he was!" I thought in dismay, but I was spared answering, as William himself came in at that moment for tea, and afterwards insisted on seeing me back to the Culvers'.

After that first day life settled down apparently quietly enough. I found the "Nature Vibrationists" consisted of Evadne and Ted, who were, so to speak, its

high priests, of Kissa Lenine, who was allowed to " lea a little painting " on condition she never worked fr the nude, and of a child of sixty summers, who sha the Culvers' cottage, and who wore a poke bonnet her snowy hair and a tame marmoset on her should He was the curse of our lives, that marmoset, for would get loose and shin up the trees in the carn wh we worked, and then she gave us no peace till he v caught again. Also he ate our paints, until one c when we pointed out to his owner a herd of those pink young pigs who are profusely freckled with blue in pa of their persons.

" That's the result of their having made too free w cobalt and go-to-hell-Rosa," said Ted gravely. (T German make of rose madder we used had " 2. F Rosa " inscribed on the tubes, hence the name by wh I regret to say, it was known amongst us.) " Y wouldn't like Jacko to come out all over spots like th would you? "

After that the Child of Sixty Summers kept a stri eye on her darling, but I think no one else was so when he overdid it on her flake white, though we tifully gave flowers for the funeral. However, we w little better off, for she then started ring-doves, wh cooed unceasingly, till Ted threatened to come do in the night and cut them off at the ring. These, were discarded, for, as she told us: " My dears, I t Roderick shopping with me into Penzance the ot day, and he misbehaved himself. . . . What *do* think he did? He laid an egg on the counter! "

Although I did not succumb to the methods of " Nature Vibrationists," I did quite a crop of little tures in the intervals of posing. For the latter occu

tion, attired in a Greek dress of white *crêpe* and a mangy leopard skin from which Evadne had cut away the scalloped red flannel edge, I entwined myself in trees or poised as though for flight, hand to ear, striving after the expression Ted demanded, which was to be of "startled nymphhood mingled with Hellenic impersonality"! He spent most of his time doing a series of little nudes, for which the model—a peroxide blonde with the loveliest mouth in the world, a silly little chin and a supple figure, posed on a private strip of beach, with—why, I cannot imagine—her fiancé sitting on the rocks above as chaperon. Her name, not unhumorously, considering her profession precluded the wearing of so much as a thread, was Cotton—Gladys Cotton—and we called her Gladeyes. She was of that curious betwixt-and-between class who seem to err on the side of over-refinement, and though she talked to me a good deal, treating me to what I could not help feeling was a rather *posé* philosophy, it was not possible to make much of a comrade of her. Her chief characteristic just then was an aggressive purity of soul. She talked to me of her profession, telling me how a "dear friend" had advised her to adopt it. "You see, Miss Lovel," she confided, "he said to me, 'You have that beautiful innocence which wouldn't mind,' and I thought that was so exquisite, don't you?" I replied prosaically that I had never been able to understand the connection of the idea of indecency with the human body, and that I should as soon think of having to control my thoughts before looking at the Marble Arch. This placid point of view seemed to annoy her, and I suppose it was to impress me with her superior delicacy that she—very inconsistently—refused to come bathing with Ted and

William and myself. "You do bathe, don't you?" I asked in surprise. "Thank you, Miss Lovel," she replied. "I do bathe—but not mixed."

The two people I saw most of away from work hours were Kissa and William. Kissa had elected to take for me what, in the school-girl parlance from which she was only just emancipated, she would have called "a rave." I often went to tea with her on the wind-swept lawn of the bleak moorland vicarage, and always William turned up and saw me home. Once or twice when I caught Kissa's brown eye looking wistfully at him, I tried to shake him off, but there was a burr-like quality about William at times. Undoubtedly he liked me very much, and it roused a little demon of amusement in me to see how his disapproval of my way of life kept on fighting with what I was beginning regretfully to feel was his affection. And yet—was it regret and fear I felt, supposing it were so? Ever since that night in Clownance, when for the first time in my wandering existence, the spell of a roof tree and fireside had descended on me, my point of view had been changing. The life of a country house, that unique and English thing, was luring me; convention itself seemed restful and oh, so conducive to self-respect. Not only Clownance was attracting me but even William, because of the life he could give me. He was not a rich man, only having enough to live quietly on his own land and have a shoot and a fishing up-country, but he would buy Clownance back for me if I asked him to. And I should watch the rotation of the crops with him year by year, and become a cabbage myself, and what was there more peaceful, idyllic and wholesome than a cabbage? I let both William and myself drift, for the spell of that side

of my inheritance which till now had never been called into play, was on me. And, all this time, what was Peter doing that I was so cut off from the old atmosphere, which letters would have succeeded in keeping up? He had only written to me once, quite at the beginning.

"I miss you very much" (his letter ran), "and London looks dreadfully itself again without you. It was good going about with you. I once saw a countryman in a smock-frock at Ludgate Circus; white butterflies visit my fifth-floor window-boxes; a thrush used to sing in a square where I lived, and I have met sheep being driven down the Strand. But a dryad on a motor 'bus and me with her is a thing that never happened in London till you came there——"

I wore this letter in the breast-pocket of my pyjamas as an amulet for some time, but when no more followed it, I put it away in disgrace. I thought of Peter, his gay philosophy, his fits of black depression, and his unvarying grasp through both of some central fact; and I tried to catch some of his gift for seeing that inner soul which he always declared fitted "into and around everything like air," but in vain. It was not for me to see the little kingdoms Peter bore about with him, for on me the spell of tangible things was strong just then. I tried to clear my mind by sleeping out, a proceeding more potent in that respect than most things I know of. The sleep itself is broken and little as to quantity, but it is exquisite in quality. One cannot have a bad dream out of doors. I slung a hammock between the only two suitable trees, which happened to be at the side of the mill dam (the mill itself stood under the hill lower down), and I trained my sub-conscious mind

to make me fall out on the field-side of the hammock instead of into the dam. It is no relief sleeping out of doors unless you undress and really go to bed, so I trailed out across the fields to my hammock every night, attired in the "peach-bloomers," as Peter had dubbed them, with sheets and blankets and an apple in my arms. From the carn came the tremulous calling of the owls, which has the plaintive melancholy of a distant reed-pipe; in a field near a horse would stamp and shake itself; every now and then came the suspicious note of some farm dog; while sometimes, all down the valley, sounded the bark of a fox, which is not a bark at all, but like nothing on earth save Coleridge's line

"——woman wailing for her demon-lover."

I lay in my hammock and listened to the long-drawn ululations till they thrilled in my blood and the leaves of the hazel bushes beside the dam seemed to stir with the sighs from a lost soul.

With the approach of dawn and the plop-plop of the tiny trout in the dam as they rose at the earliest flies, I would bait two or three fish lines with which I poached, and leave them there while I slipped on my big coat and went, towel in hand, down the valley to the cove. To do this, I had to pass the Culvers' house, which stood in a narrow strip of garden raised some six feet above the road, and one morning, catching an unwonted gleam of white through their gate, I ran up the steps and looked over. At first I thought the German invasion must have come, and that I was looking on an impromptu field-hospital, for what met my gaze was a row of little beds, all side by side. Then on their respective pillows I made out the shock head of Ted

and the very similar one appertaining to Evadne, the white locks, looking strangely unreverend in their abandon, of the Child of Sixty Summers, the curls, aggressively golden even in the dim grey dawn, of Miss Gladys Cotton, and on a mattress beyond her, the prim, small head and unfinished chin of her fiancé, whose name was Albert, and whose profession, when not on his holiday, was, I should have guessed, that of "sign" in a big shop. Somehow they all looked very incongruous lying there, and I leant on the gate convulsed with silent mirth and wondering what would be the feelings of any well-brought-up tramp who had chanced to hap upon this scene.

It was later in that day that I managed to get my own back on Gladeyes. She was telling me of what a delightful night they had all had, and didn't I think it was a beautiful thing to do, and wouldn't I bring my bed and join them? I knew Ted and Evadne to possess the most genuinely simple and charming minds on earth, but I was not so sure of the simplicity of Gladeyes, and I freely admitted to myself that my own objected to doing anything as intimate as getting into bed in front of any of them, let alone Albert. Sleeping out of doors is too good a thing to profane, therefore I refused Miss Cotton's kind invitation. She opened her beautiful agate-coloured eyes at me in a stare of protest.

"Oh, but you *do* sleep out, *don't* you?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," I replied sweetly, "I do sleep out—but not mixed."

CHAPTER XXII

AN EPITAPH

THERE was no mistaking William's intentions by the end of August, when my engagement with the Culvers ended also. Something—perhaps my aversion to anything settled and definite—had made me avoid William of late, and turn too-pointed conversations by force, but when he announced his intention of giving a dinner party to which the Lenines, a few neighbours and I were to be bidden, while all the world was to come to some sort of entertainment ending with a small dance afterwards, then I felt the moment was at hand. My frock was a serious trouble to me, for the simple reason that I hadn't any. William wished me to let his mother give me one, but I refused. I didn't want William presented to me with a pound of tea, so to speak. Eventually I washed and ironed my white *crêpe* Greek dress, girdling it with a silver cord. Evadne lent me some lovely misty old lace to give it more of a "truly gown" look, and I painted my slippers with some silver paint Ted kept for "doing haloes" with. Unexpectedly gallant, Ted went to Penzance that morning and brought me a pair of long white *suède* gloves and a bunch of roses—the kind that are so dark they have a velvety blackness on them.

In the afternoon I went to a garden party and sale of work at the vicarage. William was too busy with his preparations to come, and I felt very lonely. Mrs.

Lenine had for some time been a little distant towards me, the guests were all people who had known each other for years, and Kissa, though she was as sweet as ever, was pale and quiet. She was looking especially pretty, attired in pale blue, a Philistine colour I abhor, but in which she seemed charming. Her hat was too grey a blue for the more skiey nature of her frock, and as she exerted herself running about with cups of tea, her delicate little nose would have been the better for some powder, and yet both these things seemed an added charm, because they showed how unsophisticated she was. I went away and watched her from behind a clump of dahlias, and the silly hot tears kept coming to my eyes. I hated myself because I had not led a sheltered life like she had, because I wore my perpetual old silk shirt and a holland skirt I'd made myself. In short, I felt I was young in years but middle-aged in vice, and I grew very silly and unhappy, and, worst of all, self-pitying—just the mood for which William's admiration and protectiveness would be the best salve. And then, still behind my dahlia bush, I heard two women talking.

"Poor little Kissa," said one, "anyone can see she's head over ears in love with him, and he's going to marry Miss Lovel, who hasn't a penny and has come from heaven knows where."

"Oh, her family are very well known down here. I remember her father—such a charming man, but quite mad. I'm sorry for Mrs. Lenine; of course she'd always counted on young Penrose for Kissa——" the voices drifted away. I remained with burning cheeks and a heart that went thump-thump. So that was why Kissa looked so pale, why she was perpetually discussing love and marriage with me! I had never thought for

an instant that she had more than the affection of a playmate for William, or I would have nipped him in the bud at once. All that I could do now was to go away and leave William to the one person who really would suit him. For, infatuated as he was with me, it was Kissa's type which was his ideal, and to which, while never recognising that she was of it, he was always unconsciously trying to fit me. In the long run all that William would want of his wife would be that she should never say, do or think anything unconventional. Farewell to my dreams of Clownance, for though, if I had been in love with William, I should have gone straight for him and held him—yes, and made him glad to be held—against anyone, I could not take him from Kissa when she cared and I did not.

I stayed behind my dahlia bush, staring at the sun-bleached lawn, with loneliness and resentment surging up within me Against the steely-purple clouds that often mass up in a blue sky, the church tower, in full sunshine, with its one pinnacle cocked at the corner, showed a light grey-white; beyond it the roll of the moors made a faint stain of hyacinth. Everything was in an extraordinarily high key, the shadows all light and soft, even the black silk jet-trimmed "best dresses" of some of the parishioners looked, in the full sun, of a grey-green tone. The "county" was mostly in linen coats and skirts or last year's muslins, the few men were in flannels; and everyone was talking and looking as though St. Annan's parochial party were the most absorbing function on earth and St. Annan's vicarage garden the only place bounded by an intent horizon. And I wished fiercely, with all my heart, that I could be one of them. I realised that the worst—the only—pen-

alty that I paid for a wandering and precarious existence was that it made me feel different from other girls, girls brought up as Kissa had been, innocent and sheltered. I realised that what had always given me that little feeling of shyness with Kissa, which I had never acknowledged even to myself, was that I felt unfit to be her friend, that at the bottom of my heart I was aware that if Mr. and Mrs. Lenine knew all that I had seen and done, they might not like Kissa to make a friend of me. I had felt prickings of the same feeling before, as I have since, but never with the burning fierceness of that afternoon. Turning, I ran out of the garden, down the empty village street, where the granite cottages glittered with a thousand little diamond-like facets in the sun; up the steps leading to the churchyard, and so, blindly, to the dim, bare coolness of the church. There the bleakness and austerity of the place began to soothe me, and after a while I wandered out again, and, rounding the church, came into a wing of shade thrown by the angle of the transept. There a brass tablet let into the stone of the wall caught my eye, and I stood staring up at it for a minute without taking it in, for it was stained darkly with time and weather and the lettering was uneven.

There are moments in life when an external and apparently alien thing strikes at the heart, because the thing itself was conceived in a mood or was the direct outflow of a feeling which finds kinship in oneself. The four lines I now read flashed on me with that quality of gleam, and stirred a something which was more a certain knowledge than a hope, and which I had not known was in me.

The tablet bore the date 1721, and had been put up

by my little ancestress to her husband, who had died at the age of eighty-five. It ran thus:—

> "Sleep here awhile,
> Thou dearest Part of Me—
> In little while
> I'll come and sleep with Thee."

She died a year later, aged eighty.

I repeated it over and over, and then I went across the moors to Clownance with it like a song in my heart. I went along a windy ridge, level with the crests of a copse of ash and oak, all the leaves blown pale side outwards, as they fluttered from me on their yielding twigs. Through the gaps in the foliage, I caught glimpses of that far distance which is of the blue of wood smoke—before it lay miles of moorland, patched here and there with parti-coloured fields, and dappled with cloud shadows, spilled over it like purple wine stains. Then the copse ended, and I came out on a wide, sloping field, where the corn still lay heaped in little stooks, before being built into the great Cornish arrishmows, and from it the dusty-brown partridges whirred clamorously at my approach. All among the stubble wandered a long-stemmed polygonum, whose red leaves, shaped like arrow heads, glowed transparent as blood where the low-lying sun shone through them. To my left, a little quarry, cut out of a streak of deeply orange soil, was scarped into great ribs, where the ragwort lay in drifts like yellow stars, while from the floor of it clumps of smoke-blue borage, tipped with specks of flame-colour, seemed to puff upwards. Smoke and stardrift—hearth-fires and an answering sky—of such was the life the pearly lady and her husband must have led, for of such

things was the soul—homely enough, yet with the certainty of the future and the inner vision that Peter possessed, which had inspired that epitaph. And I had thought it possible to give up all hope of that, for safety with Harry (how long ago he seemed!), or the "right atmosphere" with William. Because I never was able to believe in what is known as a great passion, the lauded thrill of "being in love," I had thought the whole thing left me indifferent. Now, in the pearly lady's epitaph, I saw the other side. A protecting affection was in itself a passion, because, in year after year of intercourse and interchange, it fused two people in one more completely than any transitory gleam of fervour, however on the heights that might be. And, of all emotions, fusion of oneself in another—that "dearest part" of one, must be the most intense. Peter, I guessed, would have seen things somewhat differently, for him the heights were not mere projections of the imagination that never touched him personally. But I was not Peter, and could only walk by what light I had, and that it was a very lowly one, a mere beckoning spark from a distant hearth I might never reach, was no reason why, now I had caught sight of it, I should ever be false to it again. Down the valley side to home I scrambled, intoning to a little no-tune of my own:—

"Sleep here awhile,
Thou dearest Part of Me—
In little while
I'll come and sleep with Thee."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ODDS AND ENDS

AS I sat beside William that night in the panelled dining-room at Boscarn, I realised that I should have to do something pretty violent to shock him out of his feeling for me. Merely to go away in a noble self-sacrificing manner would be to have him after me; the unpleasant task must be mine of shocking his *amour-propre* into Kissa's keeping. I looked about me, at the portraits, mediocre in themselves, valuable to the Penroses as relics of their kin; at the old silver, on which the candle-light sparkled, at Kissa, looking so absolutely "right" in her Romney muslin frock and blue sash, with pearls in her soft hair; and I realised that the spell which had been on me, drawing me to this kind of life, had lost its grip. (Do spells have a grip, I wonder? I have always pictured them as long, waving whitenesses with sinuous fingers, wreathing out of a cauldron, or off a fairy ring on a hillside.)

"I want you to come and see the orchids with me, before everyone begins to arrive," murmured William in my ear after dinner. "Why not?" he added, as I shook my head. I explained I hated sitting round in conservatories and that sort of thing. A pleased and somewhat fatuous smile dawned on his face.

"I'm so glad nothing has spoiled you, Viv," he said. "Many girls leading your life——" he paused.

"Well, what?" said I, on the defensive.

"Well, wouldn't be so particular about the kind of thing you mean. Of course, you must meet cads who'd like to sit out in conservatories with you, and who wouldn't mean anything except to flirt with you. But you know I don't mean——"

"I've never come across the kind of person you mention," I flared, forgetting in my temper, that I was saying the wrong thing for the rôle I meant to adopt. "I'm not the sort of girl who gets kissed in conservatories."

"Darling—I beg your pardon, it slipped out, but I mean it—I know you're not. That's just what I'm saying. That sort of life hasn't touched you. There's nothing about you a man wouldn't want in his wife. Viv, I must tell you that——"

"William, your tie is crooked, and it gives you such a squiffy appearance," I interrupted. A look of pain at my tactlessness and the slangy expression I used crossed his face, but his hand flew to his tie and his gaze to a mirror, and I slipped away. Soon after all the world began to arrive, and I attached myself to Evadne and Ted, till William, as master of the ceremonies, drove us all on to the lawn, on which rows of chairs were arranged, and across the far end of which a pair of curtains hung. I saw Gladeyes amongst the audience, evidently in the mood of girlish modesty she assumed with her clothes, for she was in one of those little half-hearted frocks, that are neither high nor low, neither bond nor free. I don't mean that Gladeyes was immodest when out of her garments—she wasn't—only she couldn't be natural about it, any more than I thought she could be about anything else—in which last supposition I proved wrong. I noticed she was placed at the

back with the servants, a position I feared she would find insulting, but there again I was wrong—she was happier when able to imagine people asking "who was that wonderfully elegant girl" than she would have been had she looked out of place in not such a pleasing manner among her superiors. I found myself sat down beside William, in the unenviable publicity of the front row, and whispered, "What's going to happen?"

"It's a troupe of performers who've just come down to Penzance," whispered William back again. "They've made rather a hit at Falmouth. They call themselves 'The Odds and Ends.'"

Behind the curtains someone tuned a fiddle, and then began to play—a light, lilting thing I had never heard before. The curtains rattled asunder, and there was presented to our gaze, against a background of trees, and illuminated by fairy lights and Chinese lanterns hanging from the boughs, and a row of footlights in front, the company of the Odds and Ends. After the first moment of incredulity, I only saw the one who was playing the fiddle, and he was Peter.

He looked straight at me from under the pale locks matted over his browner forehead and fair, flaunting eyebrows; he was dressed, as to the upper part, in fleshings, a trail of ivy being, as a concession to the feelings of the audience, artfully disposed across his chest. From the waist downwards he had achieved a triumph in goatskin breeches, and his hoofs were miracles of cardboard. His ears, always crested at the tip, were added to by spirals of wax, and he wagged them at me in time to the music in a way he knew I detested. Then he stepped forward and made a little speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "allow me to pre-

sent to you, as their spokesman, the company of Odds and Ends. We are the left-overs of the world, relics of the time of the great god Pan, obliged to exploit ourselves for a living. I am, as you see, a Faun, here is the Last of the Mermaids, in the watertight pram." (The "pram" was a tank on wheels, over one end of which drooped the sea-lady's tail, while at the other appeared her pale face and weed-bound hair—the face and hair of Chloe. She looked lovely in a sleek, half-drowned way suitable to her rôle, though very different from her usual type.) "Here," continued Peter, "is a Troubadour, who will sing old minstrels' songs to you. And here is our Centaur, whose name is Algernon Lackword. This is not, as you might suppose, one of the players from 'Chantecler,' but the Phœnix, rising from the ashes of a misspent life. This india-rubbery looking individual is a Changeling, while the last of all is the original black cat belonging to the Witch of Endor. I must apologise for the absence of our Dryad, but she missed the train at Falmouth. I hope she caught a later one and will be here in time to give a dance."

By now I had pulled myself together a trifle, and recognised the Changeling—an easy task, for she was attired in dark tights as she was wont to be at Haggett's, though a skull cap rather like a harlequin's was fitted over her head. In the Troubadour, in spite of a long red wig, I recognised, to my intense surprise, Edgar Murdock. I was at a loss to identify the Centaur, who was constructed in the best pantomime manner of two individuals who formed his front and his back half respectively. In the Phœnix, a bunchy kind of bird covered with bronze feathers and reposing, apparently asleep, in a wicker-work nest, I, to my horror, recognised

Littlejohn. Luckily the night was warm, and she appeared to be sleeping through the proceedings with her usual sang-froid. The Witch of Endor's cat was, of course, the Nelephant. I wondered very much whom the Dryad Peter had referred to might be.

His little speech concluded, he bowed and retreated, and the performance began. The Centaur's jig was a marvel of ingenuity. To see his fore and his hind legs setting to each other as to partners was very pleasant. After that, being a centaur of (literally) many parts, he picked up the violin and began to play. I recognised the air at once—it was Bruneau's setting of Catulle Mendes' exquisite song "L'Heureux Vagabond," and Peter stepped forward to sing it. In his sweet though not very powerful baritone the gay, pathetic words fell on my ears with added meaning, and I buried my fingers in my bunch of roses.

"Je m'envais par les chemins, lirelin,"

sang Peter, and I thought of how I had purposed leaving him to tramp along those roads without me, who had called myself his friend.

"J'ai dans mon cœur fleuri
(Chante, rossignol, chante si je ris!),
J'ai dans mon cœur joli, lireli, ma mie!"

I felt the old lilt waking in my blood, I raised my head and met Peter's eyes. He flung back his head triumphantly as he drew to the end of the song, when the vagabond, robbed of his *trois écus* and with no more bread, still sings that—

"J'ai dans mon cœur pleurant
(Chante, rossignol, chante en soupirant!),
J'ai dans mon cœur mourant, lirelan, ma mie!"

Oh, what a mistake I had been on the point of making! To imagine I could ever settle down to *be audience,* like these well-fed people round me, who applauded in a patronising way! I felt doubly an impostor as I sat there, for I knew I was on the wrong side of the footlights. I heard Peter speaking again; he had a telegram in his hand.

"I am sorry to say this is from the Dryad announcing that the train, when she did catch it, took her to the wrong place. Is there any dryad in disguise among the audience who would be kind enough to give us a dance instead?"

I stood up, and William's hand flew to my arm. "Viv, Viv, sit down! What are you doing?" he whispered.

"It's no good, William. Let me go. You can't stop me; I *must* go," and I slipped from his irresolute grasp and through the curtains. There Peter was waiting me.

"D'you want to break away, Viv?" he asked. "If not, say the word and I'll go. But I couldn't help thinking it might be a case of saving your soul alive. It is? Come and do a faun and nymph dance with me. Those slippers won't do!"

I kicked them off and threw my silk stockings after them, and the next moment I was dancing on to the grassy stage. After the first few moments I ceased to see William's hurt and angry face and forgot everything except that I was a dryad again, free and uncaught, dancing for joy of the cool grass against my bare toes. Then, at sound of questing hoof, I darted behind a tree, and Peter pranced on, and, pan-pipes to his mouth, began to play cunningly. I peeped round my tree, put out a foot, hesitated, finally fell under the spell of the

music and danced into the open. Wilder and wilder grew the music, more and more it urged the dryad, till her almost exhausted breath beat in her throat like a bird, and she sank on the turf. The faun sprang forward and scattered red roses over her, then swept her up into his arms and ran towards the trees. In a moment I was myself again, and breaking free, I ran off and away. On and on, with my frock turned up over my shoulders like a cape, I ran; through the gate at the end of the plantation, across the strip of moorland, where I splashed into little pools, not slowing down till I was in the carn. I still broke into little runs, crushing the slippery, brittle toadstools and sinking into the drifts of dead leaves that made a noise like surf as I plunged through them. The moon shining through the branches flung a net of shadows over the floor of the wood, and the gleams of light ran up over and over me as I went like the ripples of a tide. Not until I was out on the rutted track leading to the Manor did I feel tired; and then I knew my feet hurt me and that I wanted to lie down, and I went to bed as I was and slept soundly. The sun was just rising when I woke and went downstairs to the hall. A fire was burning on the hearth and by it sat Peter, still in faun's attire.

"I do want some breakfast, don't you?" he said.

I did. "Come, and I'll show you where to draw water," I replied, and I led the way to the well. "The water's full of black slugs with yellowfrills," I explained, "so you must be careful not to let them get into the kettle, as they're apt to stick in the spout, which they fit as a banana does its skin."

We filled the kettle, and then, girdling my gown round my hips with the silver cord, I took the pail from the

well and bore it to a field near by. There, with many blandishments, I approached a cow, and inserting myself and my pail beneath her, proceeded to steal her milk. I knew where a hen from a neighbouring farm was laying astray, and I went to her hedge-hidden haunt and drew out three warm brown eggs. A large forlorn mushroom I found on my way back was added to the other provisions, and then Peter and I had the best breakfast ever eaten, all cooked in relays in an old kettle without a lid. When we had finished, we broke our egg shells so as to harbour no evil spirits, and emptied the remains of the milk over my ancestral threshold as a libation to the gods. And I told him all about everything and, as nearly as was possible for a man, he understood.

"We can catch the early train from Penzance if we can find something to drive us in," he said, pulling the watch out of the recesses of his goatskin; "I told the others to wait for us on the platform."

"Tell me, Peter, why didn't you write?"

"Because I saw a chance of coming down here just when your engagement with the Culvers was up. I didn't think of your engagement with anyone else being on," he added slyly.

"And who are the others? I saw Chloe and the Changeling and Edgar Murdock and Littlejohn, who had no business to be up so late."

"It was such a mild night. The Centaur was Jo and her young man."

"What young man? This is something new. Peter, is it serious? How thrilled I am!"

"Very serious. His name is Chas. G. Chetwynd, and they're engaged."

"What's he?"

"Oh, a sort of man-about-town, but a ripping good chap. We call him 'The Man-about' for short. Jo calls him 'Chas.' She's training him."

"So I should imagine. Which half was he? Front, I suppose, or I should have recognised Jo's face."

"Yes, and he said it augured well for their married life that he should be the head, but Jo said that, to use a very vulgar expression, it showed that she would wear the breeches."

"Peter," I said thoughtfully, "who was the Dryad who missed the train at Falmouth?"

"Oh," replied Peter, with a grin, "she was in the nature of a decoy duck. Her name, I should fancy, would be Mrs. Harris! Now I think you'd better begin to get ready."

I wrote a note to William and his mother, and another to Evadne, left my borrowed plumes on the bed, threw my own belongings into a bag, and then went down again to the hall, where I paused to say farewell to the pearly lady. Then we went to the neighbouring farm, caught the pony and led it into the yard, where the farm dog came cringing out to us with wagging tail but curled back lip. There was no one about, apparently everyone was busy with the cows, so we put in the pony, chalked a message on the door of the cart-shed, and drove off through the fragrance of the early morning to Penzance. Along the quay we went, where hundreds of little pointed waves, sparkling in the sun, rose and fell incessantly, each always in the same place, so that the little boats nudged each other and ripples of light flickered over their white-painted sides. We found a boy to whom we confided the return of the pony and cart, and at a little cottage bought a big bunch of dew-

wet roses as a farewell present for the farmer's wife. Then Peter and I ran on to the station.

> "J'ai dans mon cœur fleuri
> (Chante, rossignol, chante si je ris),
> J'ai dans mon cœur joli, lireli, ma mie!"

hummed Peter, and hand in hand we went to the tune of it.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LONG-LOST PARENT

PETER fled straight to the waiting room to change behind a dusty palm while I "leapt screaming" down the platform, and, after my physical absence and my more serious mental deflection, was once more hugged by Littlejohn and the Changeling, Jo and Chloe. I even tried to embrace the Nelephant, but, ever chary of caresses, she merely shrieked with rage. Then I became aware of a stranger looming by the luggage, and Jo now dragged him towards me.

"This is Charles G. Chetwynd, and we're engaged," she said, "and I am going to be a bromide and say I hope you'll like each other, since you're both friends of mine. But he really is rather nice, Viv."

The Man-about was a youngish in-the-thirties, his hair was very sleek and beautifully brushed back, his moustache very crisp, and his Harris-tweed suit, of the colour of Devonshire earth, just matched his eyes. He was one of those men who give you the impression of being thoroughly "nice," which he was. The only kink in him was claimed by his nose, which had a humorous twist to one side, and I have heard that all his relations put down what they call "poor dear Charles' eccentricities" to that twist in his nose. "He gets it from his poor mother," they would add, murmuring "Bohemian blood," as though it were the kind of thing that broke

out in a moral eczema. The Man-about's mother, I may mention, I have since had the joy of meeting, and she is the sort of whimsical, placid, delightfully naughty old lady who would shock poor Mrs. Penrose out of her well-preserved skin. I bore Jo off on the pretext of hunting for a carriage, and burst forth with questions.

"Do tell me all about it; you are a dark horse, Jo! Tell me—when, where, how—and why?"

"I've known him from my youth up," began Jo obediently, "but I couldn't bring myself to marry a soldier. He's really awfully good at painting for an amateur, only he's never had the chance to study, owing to the misfortune of being an elder son. But now he's the head of the family and will no longer have to trail about with his regiment, so I said I'd think about it. Doesn't it all sound calculating! But there's a little thing I forgot to mention."

"And that?"

"Oh, well! I'm what I suppose one would call 'in love' with him," said Jo, and her round even-coloured face became a deep brick-red. "We shall be awfully poor, according to his way of thinking, because he has two sisters to bring out, and an aged parent to support in the Dower House. Only, as a matter of fact, they're all going on living in the big house for the first year, because Charles and I want to travel."

Here, the Man-about himself retrieved us from the far end of the station, where we had wandered, and packed us into a carriage.

"First-class!" said Jo, reprovingly. "Chas, have you dared to have our tickets excessed?"

"If you think I'm going to let you travel third while I'm with you, you're mistaken," replied the Man-about.

The Milky Way

"I am far too fond of my own creature comforts. Josy, sure you wouldn't like a cup of coffee? Your feet aren't cold?"

To hear our manly Jo called Josy, and asked if her feet were cold! I think in that moment I realised I'd always been a bit selfish towards Jo—she was such a tower of strength in her quiet, humorous, apparently lazy way, that one had drifted into a state of mind about her which had never allowed for her having a life of her own.

I looked round the carriage. In one corner sat the Changeling, in her arms, Littlejohn, who was sucking rather obtrusively at her bottle. Opposite, Chloe was curled up, giving the Nelephant, out of the palm of her hand, milk stolen from Littlejohn. Peter, attired in an old flannel suit, his faunship under his arm in a bundle, was coming up the platform. All the Odds and Ends were assembled, saving Edgar Murdock—I could almost believe I had dreamt him.

"And the Troubadour?" I asked.

"Poor boy!" said Jo, "he's coming, I hope. Go into the corridor, Chas; you mustn't hear this, it's not my secret. I can't think why he's so late. His mother died, and he made his way to the Hencoop to find you. However, when I saw what a loose end he was at, I told him I knew the whole story, and I really think he was enormously relieved. He said he could never be honest, unless somebody knew enough to make him, so he stayed with Peter while the farm land was being sold, and we saw him dispatch the money to pay all his debts. He's got a couple of hundred left over and is thinking of emigrating, and, do you know, Viv, I think it the best thing he could do. I know he won't run straight for

long here. But he wouldn't go till he'd seen you again; he thinks the world of you. Here's Peter—I say, Peter, have you seen Edgar Murdock anywhere?"

"Edgar, and more than Edgar is now approaching," replied Peter.

"More than——? What d'you mean?" I asked, and sticking my head out of the window, I saw, to my surprise, Gladys Cotton, hanging on Edgar's arm, and mopping at her eyes with a pale pink handkerchief. At sight of me, she started to run towards me, then halted, and jumping out, I went to meet her.

"Why, what's the matter, Gladeyes?" I asked anxiously, "have you come with a message? There's nothing wrong with anyone, is there?"

"Only with me!" sobbed Gladeyes. "Please go on ahead, Mr. Murdock; you've been most kind, I'm sure. Oh, Miss Lovel, please, I must come with you. You've got my baby. Oh, oh, oh!" And the handkerchief flew up again.

"Your baby!" I echoed, with, as I recognised, aversion in my voice, for something told me she was speaking the truth, and in a flash, I knew what the withdrawal of my Littlejohn would mean to me.

"Yes, my baby. Can a mother"—and here, without being unkind, I think I may say Gladeyes began to enjoy her rôle—"can a mother be mistaken in the child she bore? Never, Miss Lovel! Last night, after you'd gone and the party began to break up, and everyone was thinking your behaviour so peculiar, if you'll excuse my saying so——"

"Yes, yes, go on."

"Well, I went up to talk to the performers, because it did seem so funny, your knowing them, I mean——"

"Never mind about me. Do go on."

"And then something in the turn of the baby's head caught my eye, and I went and took her up, and she was my Lucy."

Gladeyes sobbed afresh, and I found myself, idiotically enough, thinking how inappropriate Lucy seemed as a name for my Littlejohn.

"I don't see that you can be sure," I began.

"Nor did I at first, Miss Lovel. But then I asked questions, and Mr. Murdock began to say how you'd got her off a ship that was sinking, and the big young lady came along and shut him up. But then I knew, because you see it was me who was on the sailing ship. And when we struck, I made sure we were going down, because you always think a steamer's bound to come out best, don't you? And I saw you standing there, and I just dropped baby down to you, shrieking 'London,' meaning to say, if I wasn't drowned, I'd meet you and baby there."

"And why didn't you?" said I, sternly.

"I—oh, don't despise me. But, you see I was coming back from Brittany—I'd been ill there. Lucy was born there."

"Yes?"

"I'd been sitting to the gentleman who's Lucy's father, for he's a gentleman, right enough. And Lucy came, and I was very ill, and after I was better, he seemed to like me again, and made me sit with Lucy for a Virgin and Child. And I found that that was all he wanted. When he'd finished that picture, he gave me some money and said Brittany was played out, and went away. So I came back to London, meaning to face the world hon-

est, in spite of baby, but then—after you'd taken her and I knew she was safe—well, it seemed a Providence. And it was a good thing, for her own sake, I threw Lucy down to you, because we were driven ashore, and clung for five hours to the rigging, soaked through. She'd have caught her death."

"But I don't understand," said I in bewilderment, "how you could want not to have your own baby?"

"The gentleman and I weren't married, Miss Lovel. And I dreaded facing everyone I knew in London so. But now I don't care. I've left Albert and everything, and him getting three pounds a week already. *I must have Lucy.*"

In the last words, every shred of pose fell away from Gladeyes; she spoke fiercely, and her fingers tightened on my arm.

"Go along to that carriage," said I. "You'll find her there. I'll get your ticket."

I just waited to see, with a dreadful, jealous pang at my heart, Gladeyes snatching up Littlejohn and covering her with kisses. That child, I am glad to say, lived up to my opinion of her sagacity by breaking into a wail.

"Don't cry, my lamb, mother's got you," cooed Gladeyes.

"Mother got her so suddenly it made her cry," observed Peter. Then he pursued me to the booking office and there, as the story-books say, I told him all. He whistled long and low.

"By Jove, another addition to your ménage, Viv," he said rather ruefully, "and I'd already added Murdock to it in your absence. You know, it won't be nearly as nice if you've too many people hanging on to you."

"They don't hang. And Gladeyes will be self-supporting, and Edgar's a blooming millionaire compared with us."

"I wasn't thinking of ways and means. Hullo! they seem to be getting up steam. Even this train must make up its mind to leave some time, I suppose, though it seems a most casual function. Get in here, and we'll walk along the corridor. Oh, Viv, even if you collect whole orphanages and homes for inebriates round you, it's jolly good to have you again."

"And so it is to have you. I can't think how I could have ever thought of—well, never mind. But, oh, Peter, I wish you could always be with me to prevent me losing grip of the things that matter. Other things influence me so, and I lose directness of vision, somehow."

"You've got directness of vision, right enough."

"In a way. But it's not a sort of X-ray vision, like yours is."

We were at our own carriage by now. Gladeyes, her nose once more nicely powdered and the traces of tears almost gone from her pretty golden eyes, was bending over Littlejohn. For a long moment I stood looking in, sick and shaken with a jealousy I had not suspected. I loved Jo and Chloe and Peter, it was true, yet not as I had loved Littlejohn. For they could all look after themselves, more or less, but Littlejohn had been dependent on my protection, and there is no sensation in the world as satisfying as protecting what one loves. Littlejohn had taught me that much.

I stepped into the carriage, and Gladeyes, looking up, gave a little start.

"Oh, Miss Lovel," she said, "I've been telling your friends all about it, and they think it's so romantic.

About the wreck, I mean, and me being left a widow in a foreign land."

"A widow!" I exclaimed, in tactless surprise.

"Oh, yes, didn't I tell you Mr. Grey was dead? But there, I suppose you've hardly realised yet even that my name is Mrs. Grey," said Gladeyes Cotton.

CHAPTER XXV

PAN AT COVENT GARDEN

FROM Cornwall Peter went back to his attic, and while Chloe, the two pensioners and I all lived together at the Hencoop, Jo went away to spend September with the Man-about's people and only came back at the end of the month. The Changeling was very useful in the house, but there was no pretending that Littlejohn did anything for her keep, or I either, for the matter of that, beyond saving Jo and Chloe the expense of a model. Gladeyes was in regular work again, and called to take Littlejohn for an airing every Sunday. Peter began to sell an occasional story, but no luck came my way, and the thought that I was living on Jo and Chloe became unbearable.

"And they must be sick of my face and my 'altogether' by now," I said mournfully to Peter, "they must know it all by heart."

"By heart is just how I know your face," answered Peter. "As to your birthday suit, I only know that from pictures they've done of you, but I'm sure it's beautiful because all your lines are right and the way you're put together. The great thing is to be long in the leg——"

"And I'm simply all leg. But no amount of leg helps me to get a living, since I'm not a dancer or a chorus girl. And I know Jo is wanting to save for her trous-

seau, to say nothing of being in debt for the clothes she had to have when she went to stay with the Man-about's people."

"If a quid's any good to you, I've just got that for an article."

"You know I loathe borrowing," I said pettishly and very ungratefully. "Besides," I added, "you must want that quid, because you haven't sold anything since the sonnet."

"I haven't written anything the last week or so. I've tried to, but nothing came, and at last I just sat at my window and watched the sky go by. We must both try and find some settled job, Viv."

We tried. Peter obtained some circulars to address, and did so many thousands that he vowed it was enough to turn a nigger white, and he should never look at a circular without a feeling of respect again. Nothing at all rewarded my efforts, perhaps because I never like deliberately to plan anything, as it seems trying to cheat chance, who is nearly always a good friend if one trusts him. Therefore I never would advertise, but preferred to "wait for a leading," as old-fashioned people say.

One grey day we were walking rather mournfully along when at the street corner I saw a blaze of splendid fire-colour—the massed chrysanthemums which were the stock-in-trade of the stout, red-faced Flora who graced the pavement. I spent one of my last sixpences on a bunch, then, burying my nose in it, drew in a deep breath of that smell which is like nothing else but the smell of earth after rain. With it I drew inspiration.

"Peter! Flowers!" I said, "we'll sell flowers. What an ideal occupation!"

Peter caught fire at once.

"Of course!" he cried, "I must have had no soul not to have thought of it myself. And I've been so sick with London lately I might have known it was traffic with something of the country I needed. I'll go to Covent Garden to-morrow morning and lay in a stock. One may catch a glimpse of the country spirit there, who knows? Perhaps even a flash of Pan's hoof. Will you come too?"

"I'll come, but I'm not sure it would be wise of us both to sell flowers; not too close together, anyway," I said.

"That's true, and I shouldn't like you to be doing anything like that out of sight of me——"

At this moment we came level to a pavement artist—a ragged seedy-looking individual, his open cap beside him agape for pennies. I threw one in on the principle of supporting a brother of the brush, and with that came the second inspiration.

"I'll be a pavement artist!" I said, "and you shall sell flowers alongside of me."

So it was settled and I laid out my remaining capital on chalks, and then called in at the nearest police station, and made all inquiries of a very charming and fatherly policeman, who refused to believe that I was not either doing it for a bet or to benefit the suffragist cause. I found out that no licence was necessary, and obtained besides advice as to a likely "pitch." I finally settled on a stretch of pavement outside Kensington Gardens, as I thought the trees might help me.

Peter saw me back to the studio, and there over our evening cocoa, I confided the plan to Jo and Chloe. Jo is the biggest girl I have ever seen, five feet ten in height, and as she began to raise herself up from the floor, fold

upon fold, I thought she would never end, and told her so.

"Ah," said she, looming over me, "you may laugh, but I assure you, if you were as brawny a female as I, then perhaps your plan mightn't be so mad. But a little bit of a thing like you who couldn't say 'bo' to a policeman—why, it's absurd. You'd get a crowd round you and they might be rude, and then you know, you'd be utterly miserable. It's out of the question."

Here Chloe chimed in.

"Jo is quite right," she said, "it's madness. You're far too pretty for that kind of thing."

"I'm not pretty at all, beyond a pair of saucer-eyes and a chin that has an amusing little point, but you can't call that strictly beautiful. No one who's pale and has straight, mousey hair can be pretty. If I were you, I admit, I would think twice about it. And, anyway, nothing else has turned up, and I can draw, if I can do nothing else, and so, pavement artistry it will have to be. And do be sporting and cheer me up, instead of scolding."

They relented enough to take an interest in what I was to wear, and the property box was brought into use again, for my Burberry and tweed skirt, shabby though they were, still looked too much the "right" thing to be suitable. Finally, we settled on a soft, old blue-flannel shirt, open at the throat, a darker blue skirt that was literally in tatters, and an enormous black woollen shawl. Soon after four o'clock the next morning Peter called for me, and, attired in these garments, with the addition of Peter's cap, I sallied forth to help him buy his flowers at Covent Garden. Jo, in a voluminous dressing gown, made us tea and saw us off. She was

very amiable, but resisted alike our entreaties, that she should come too, and our taunts at her lack of sporting spirit.

It was at five o'clock that Peter and I approached the market. A violet sky hung to the roof crests, such an ineffable violet, deep and soft, as was more suggestive of Greece than England. Along the street, the electric lamps strung a line of white glowing spheres, and we neared each one with our shadows lying behind us; then, as we passed it, our shadows gathered themselves together, like animals before they spring, and hurled themselves ahead of us, only to shorten and fall behind again as we approached the next globe of light. So, guarded by our shadows, that seemed to weave a fairy-web as they sprang shuttlelike back and forth, we neared the market.

A pang struck me at first glimpse—the place looked so uncountrified, so like a great set-piece on the stage. Night has a way of making shapes forget their substance and their colour, but here the fierce glares intensified both; shadows fought for bare existence under bewildering cross-lights, and the market place seemed a well of life and colour set in neutral grey; as a pool of vivid seaweeds and anemones may lie in a dark expanse of rock.

We paused a moment in the side street before entering the market. Near us was a row of emptied carts, whose vermilion shafts were upreared, the shadows of their wheels lying like giant spider-webs upon the road; the unharnessed horses had the air of standing about wherever they had been left, with hanging heads and the steam softly curling from their nostrils. The sides of the white horses were streaked and matted into dark

points with sweat, and on the wet flanks of the bays the blue light of nascent dawn reflected wanly. From the market came a conflict of sounds—men's voices, the metallic scrape of struggling hoofs on the cobbles, the grind of iron-rimmed wheels against a kerb, the thuds of crates set down, and occasionally, the harsh roar, suggesting the long back-wash of pebbles on the beach, made by a van driving thunderously out of the yard. We stayed fascinated for a moment or two, then went on into the market.

There two lights were fighting for mastery—the yellow of the paraffin flares that threw intensely blue shadows, and the cold light of dawn that was as blue as ice. The whole effect was to steep the place in blueness, so that one felt as though walking in the depths of the sea. We passed stacked turnips, that showed like luminous fairy things, each reflecting pearl-like the glare of the lamps, but each with an astonishingly blue crescent of shadow on its under-curve, while further on, the glossy leaves of piled cabbages reflected the slowly paling sky in steely shimmers. Peter gripped my arm.

"Isn't it gorgeous? Oh, isn't it gorgeous?" he said. "Look at that woman passing now—that great, fat, red woman. She doesn't seem to be enjoying it a bit, she looks as impassive as a sphinx. But look at that box of Michaelmas daisies on her head. They're as fine as mist, and they're shaking like ballet-girls' skirts."

"Yes, it's splendid. But oh, Peter, look!"

Some quickening of movement, a tense little feeling of interest, in the people round, had made me turn, and Peter's eyes followed my pointing finger. There, running past a lighted stall, heads down and slippered feet flashing, went three dancers from the Covent Garden

ball. The middle figure was a man, with a dark overcoat over his evening dress, the nearer girl wore a vivid scarlet cloak, and the further one showed a fringe of flesh-pink skirt under her black domino. Something attracted their notice, and for a moment they stopped, as on poised wings. She of the vermilion domino hung backward on the man's arm, while he paused, laughing and irresolute, and the further girl remained bent forward in the attitude of running, so that the three of them were opened out like a fan. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen in my life—there was something of the Hellenic spirit about the three, not merely in their gay carelessness, but in the arrested swing of their limbs and garments—the music of graceful action, crystallised as in some sculptured frieze. So they stayed for a fleeting moment, the black and vermilion of their fluttered draperies dark against the yellow light, yet keeping a subdued vividness, and then—action was caught up again where it had been arrested, swaying skirts and outward poised feet swept forward in a harmony of curves, and with a gust of laughter, the dancers ran on and vanished.

"Oh, Peter!" I said, "oh, Peter!" I had caught his hand, and we laughed aloud for sheer joy in what we had seen. Then I remembered that in practical matters I had to be the man of the party, and I frowned sternly.

"Business, Peter, business!" said I; "we must now buy your flowers."

We laid out the money with care, mostly on chrysanthemums, choosing only those that went well together —from flaming yellow through the rosy fire-coloured ones to the deep copper-red, and then we wandered about for a little longer in a trance of pleasure, while the

dusky sky paled first to amethyst, then to a bleached whiteness that crept up like a tide, showing the draggled flower-heads and cabbage leaves trodden into the muddy ground; glimmering palely on the roofs of vans, on the upper curves of wheels, and on the metal handles of hundreds of baskets; intensifying the black and white of a couple of nuns who were buying sheaves of pearly honesty. The dawn had come, but with no effect of sunrise; no warmth in the pallid sky showed where, behind the houses, the sun was hid; rather this bleak, diffused light seemed shed with dispassionate equality. Only on the pavement some careless splashes of orange sand looked so like the reflections from some strong glow that we both glanced involuntarily upwards, then laughed over the wish that on a grey day we could go through the city scattering patches of orange sand on the pavements.

Slowly we circled the market, our arms full of flowers, meeting curious faces, insolent faces, kindly faces, but nowhere a face with that woodland look which is the best of all. At the last corner we came on a flower girl who was sorting her bunches of chrysanthemums, while her baby, folded in a shawl, was laid on a barrow near her. A reddish sun had swum up into the watery sky and was piercing it with tentative yellow, and a tremulous gleam appeared on the baby's shawl, then grew suddenly definite, and the cast shadows leapt into being. The baby opened his eyes, and caught sight of a flicker of sun gilding the shawl fringe. Slowly an answering gleam dawned in his look and he dabbed at it with an uncertain little fist. I tossed him one of the yellow flowers I carried, and rolling his round elfin head towards it he gurgled into its petals, doubtless, as I in-

formed Peter, exchanging confidences with it. Here at last we had caught a gleam of the Pan spirit, instinctive and un-self-conscious.

"It's a faun-baby, Peter," I said, and added, "Shall it be the first picture I draw on the pavement?"

"Add a feeding bottle and write 'Abandoned. Nobody loves me,' underneath, and you'll make a fortune," suggested Peter cynically.

We breakfasted at a coffee stall, and then walked through the park to Kensington, and there my nerve failed me.

"I can't sit and draw in such a populated place as this, Peter," I wailed, "I simply can't. You stay here, and I'll go to a side street."

"Nonsense. Of course I shall come too. Let's look for a quiet self-contained road with gas and h. & c."

At last we settled ourselves in a charming Georgian street, on a strip of pavement backed by a garden wall, and I took out my chalks and set to work. I had decided to do a whole series called "A Day in the Life of a Faun," and I began by showing him wriggling out of one of those great vegetable baskets that look like lobster pots. I made him slim and brown, and gave him piebald fur on his goat's legs; as a background I suggested a corner of the market, with the dome showing slate-coloured against the amethyst sky, as I had seen it that morning, and the blue light on the cabbages. In the next picture my little faun was peeping into the door of a "reach-me-down" shop, and slyly tweaking at a pair of check breeches. Next he was seen wearing them, also a knitted jersey and a pair of shoes, while he played on a flute by the steps of Piccadilly fountain. The fat flower-sellers in their hard straw hats were

Pan at Covent Garden

CHAPTER XXVI

WE "LEAP SCREAMING"

BY the time this masterpiece was achieved the sun was high in the heavens and my chalks were worn to mere stumps that hurt my finger tips to use. The crowd threatened by Jo began mysteriously to collect out of the blue, and pennies showered into my expectant cap; a good many people spoke to me, and I answered them in broadest Cornish.

There happened to be no one standing at gaze when a door in the wall opened and an elderly man, his portly form outlined in a white waistcoat, stepped on to the pavement. He came along it, then caught sight of my picture gallery and stopped abruptly.

"Is that your own work?" he asked.

"Iss, fay, for sure," said I.

Then he began to cross-examine me. Where had I learned to draw, how old was I, why was I doing it, and had I thought of the theme myself? To all of which I answered truthfully, still in Cornish. It was while the old gentleman stood gazing and rapping out his questions that I first noticed a very peculiar couple drifting up the street on the opposite side. At least, one of the persons drifted; the other and smaller, seemed to be trying to guide her along. The old gentleman saw my fixed gaze and turned too, and he, Peter and I stared at the newcomers. Forgetting my dialect, I clutched

Peter by the arm and declared: "Peter, that's either a man in disguise or a lunatic!"

For the bigger of the two creatures advancing was, indeed, large beyond the dreams of avarice, and walked with an extraordinary rolling kind of gait. She, if "she" it were, was attired in clothes far too small for her generous proportions; on her head, where the hair was sleeked down so tightly as to appear a wig, was perched a rusty and wholly inadequate crape bonnet. Enormous blue spectacles, with side-pieces of glass, were astride her nose, which latter feature stared triumphantly through a hole in the blue gauze veil that covered her face. In her arms she carried, as though it were a baby, a bunch of magenta asters, which she rocked to and fro in time with her undulating gait. The little, grey-haired person with her also wore spectacles, but of untinted glass, and her attention seemed divided between her companion and a hunch of brown bread at which she was gnawing.

A schoolgirl, with her books, was walking down the pavement; she of the goggles pranced up to her and, shaking the magenta asters, leaned forward and glared into the girl's face. With one yell, the girl dropped her books and ran.

The peculiar couple then began to cross the road in our direction, and at that moment a policeman appeared round a corner of the road. For a moment, evidently aware of their striking aspect, the couple paused, then, seeing a door in the wall, and little knowing the elderly gentleman staring at them in such amazement had just stepped out of it, they pushed it open and bolted in. Apparently propitiated by this, the policeman was passing on, when the old gentleman exploded with a violent

"Officer, officer! Go after those people at once! That's my house!"

A kind of gasping chuckle seemed to come from over my head—I looked up, and there was the lunatic leaning over the wall. She was toying—there is no other word for it—with two enormous iron nails, knocking them foolishly one against the other, and smiling seraphically. Her large hands, bursting out of their black thread gloves, seemed to flop loosely from the wrist. Ting, ting, went the nails, and the lunatic smiled on, while Peter, the old gentleman, the policeman and I, stood rooted to the spot. Then the policeman bestirred himself.

"This will need caution," he observed, heavily. "Lunatics is ticklish work."

He, too, made for the door in the wall. Suddenly Peter gave a shriek and caught my arm.

"It's Jo!" he gasped. "I recognise her nose. It's Jo and Chloe!"

It was. We, in our turn, darted into that garden; and the luckless owner of it, ejaculating "Either all of you are mad or I am!" sprinted after us.

Once within, we found ourselves in an oblong, paved courtyard, with an urn full of geraniums in the middle, and round this urn dodged the policeman, Chloe, and Jo, who had descended from the ladder which leant against the wall. Jo held her skimpy skirts well up and away from enormous elastic-sided boots, that I remembered seeing in the property box, and, whenever the policeman made a little run at her, she skipped coyly to one side, Chloe behind her. Peter slipped between them and the policeman.

"Run!" he shouted.

They put down their heads and charged. The policeman wheeled round, but there is a limit to the speed at which a heavy body can change its course, and Jo and Chloe got clear out of the door, we on their heels, the policeman and the old gentleman on ours.

"Oh, oh, idiots that we were!" shrieked Chloe, her powdered hair descending on her respectable, jet-trimmed mantle. Jo's crape bonnet rose and fell on her head like a bad rider on horseback, an ominous z-z-ip came from her skirt, but helpless laughter jerked from her as she ran. Peter and I could easily have outrun them, town birds that they were, so we seized an arm of each and urged them on.

"Stop thieves!" bellowed the old gentleman; from the policeman came no sound but the heavy thud, thud of his regulation boots. A messenger boy forgot his errand, a milkman left his cart, several indescribable unemployed joined in, and on we all tore. We doubled round a corner, then again and yet again. Our only chance lay in keeping to the network of side streets, and so it came about that we found ourselves again in the street where we had started. As I ran, the idea came into my head that the performance in which we were all engaged was absurdly like the scene I had drawn on the pavement. At our head ran the faun-like Peter, a bunch of chrysanthemums still under one arm and his flute in his hand, while behind pounded as incongruous a procession as any I could have imagined. At the thought I laughed aloud, and the more I laughed the more my breath failed me, and the less capable I became of running. We were all beginning to flag, and fresh pursuers, who had just joined the chase, were on our heels. There was only one thing to be done, and

The Milky Way

Peter did it. He dashed once more through the door in the wall, Jo, Chloe, and I after him, and slamming the door, we locked and barred it. It was then that we perceived that the old gentleman, who had early retired winded from the chase, had taken refuge in his garden to await events. As the blows of our pursuers began to rain upon the door, the old gentleman rushed to open it. I slipped in front of him, and stood with my back against it.

"Please, please listen a moment!" I begged. "We aren't mad or thieves, indeed, we aren't. It's all a mistake; I mean, part of it was a joke and the rest was trying to earn our living. Oh, do please listen!"

Considering that it must have seemed to him as though the world were upside down, or he had strayed into the middle of a comic opera, he pulled himself together wonderfully. For a second, we stood looking into each other's eyes, then at the indignant bellow of the policeman from the other side of the door, I spoke again, desperately.

"I give you my word of honour we've done nothing wrong," I said. "Please send everyone away and let me tell you about it. I'm—we all are—awfully sorry that we've upset you so."

"Upon my word, I don't know why I should believe you," he replied, "but I do believe you, all the same. Come this way——"

"The policeman?" I suggested. "Hadn't you better say something to him? Once roused, policemen are difficult to soothe."

"You are right," said the old gentleman. "Officer!" he called. "Send that rabble away and come round

to the front door. Now, young lady, perhaps you and your—your friends had better follow me."

We all trailed into the house after him and were shut into a room lined with books to think over our sins while he parleyed with the policeman. Eventually, as I have learned since, the policeman accepted a drink and a little matter of a coin as a salve for his wounded dignity, and the elderly gentleman joined us in the study.

"And now," said he, "having dragged me, a respectable publisher of the age of—of my age, round the streets with a rabble of errand boys, to say nothing of bursting into my garden and making free with my gate, perhaps you'll explain the meaning of it all. I'll hear the little lady of the pavement pictures first."

So then I began. I told him how Peter and I were stranded with nothing to do, although Peter was beginning to sell his articles, and how it had occurred to us to combine in industries of the pavement. Also how I had thought I should attract less attention if I dressed suitably for the part, hence the rusty black shawl. Peter here threw in as a parenthesis that he had found his usual clothes did very well for a flower seller just as they were. The old gentleman nodded at each point in my tale, then waved his hand towards Jo and Chloe.

"And your friends?" he asked, "who, after all, were the cause of the whole trouble, where do they come in?"

His glance softened as it fell on Chloe, and well it might. The powder had shaken out of her hair and her hair itself lay tumbled in a web of pale yellow on her shoulders. She had contrived, while the old gentleman was busy with the policeman, to turn down the prim black tucker of her gown so as to show her white, slim

neck; the be-jetted mantle she wore slipping off her shoulders like a fashionable scarf. The whole rapid adjustment was so characteristic of Chloe and so eminently successful. Her absurd little bonnet and big spectacles were tucked away in her pocket, and she now looked up appealingly.

"Oh, it was all my fault—Jo's and mine," she said artlessly, in the best "little girl" manner we knew so well. "You see, Viv—Miss Vivien Lovel, who's just been talking to you—wanted us to go with her and Mr. Whymperis to the market this morning, and when we said we didn't want to get up so early she said we weren't sporting, so Jo and I decided we would be sporting in a way Viv hadn't meant. We dressed ourselves like this and set off to find her and Peter. We had a little difficulty, because they weren't in the main road where we expected to find them. And we had such thrilling adventures. Once we had to take a taxi to get away from the crowd, and Jo bowed to the people as we drove along, like royalty."

Jo now spoke for the first time.

"My fault really," she said, in her gruff boy's voice, "and I'm paid out. I can't stretch my legs in this skirt." She laughed suddenly, her big beautiful laugh that makes you wonder how you ever thought her plain, and the next moment an answering smile began to twitch on the face of the elderly gentleman. He tried to restrain it, but unavailingly, and the next moment he broke into a roar of laughter. At the relief of it we all began to laugh helplessly, and the more we laughed the more we had to, till we ached with it, and the tears ran down. At last, still gasping, we wiped our faces and grew calmer and our host rang the bell.

"Some fruit and cake and things," he told the man who answered it, "and some hock and seltzer. I never eat more for lunch," he added, turning to us, "but I hope you'll join me. I ought to have been at my office long ago, but now it is so late it may as well be later. You seem to be the ringleader, Miss Viv, so you shall sit here by me. I want to talk to you about those drawings of yours."

I drew up my chair and we plunged into the subject of illustrating as an art. We were still at it when the lunch arrived, and afterwards, previous to summoning the cab which was the only method of getting us all home unobserved, he and I went out to inspect my stretch of pavement again.

"You must give this sort of thing up, my dear," he told me, "and come into the legitimate profession of illustrating. I'm not going to promise anything, but I shouldn't wonder if I hadn't work for you to do."

"Oh, you're an angel," I said, "but do you think you could possibly find something for Peter too? You've no idea how brilliantly he writes, far, far better than I draw."

"Tell me about this Peter of yours. Any relation, eh?"

"No; I only met him six months ago, on a cargo tramp. We were wrecked and lost all our worldly goods. So we became platonics—I'm great on platonics—and have always tried to get things to do together ever since."

"In short, you love him like a brother," remarked my new friend.

"No, it doesn't feel quite like that," I said, wrinkling my brows, "it's more—more as though he were my son.

Don't laugh at me—girls *are* always older than men, you know."

"I wasn't laughing, my dear," he said. Then, "I'll see what I can do for your Peter. Send specimens of your work—yours and his—round to my office. Here's my card. And now for two cabs—you've made me so confoundedly late between you I shall have to forego my usual exercise. Though when I think of that run I'm not sure I haven't had enough to last me a week!"

He bade us farewell and we insisted on his acceptance of all Peter's stock of flowers to decorate his office, and then Jo, Chloe, Peter and I drove off in state to the Hencoop. It was late that night, after much excited discussion of what the future might bring forth, that Peter went home to his attic. The chrysanthemum he had stuck in his button-hole he gave to me, and I slept with it under my pillow as a mascot.

CHAPTER XXVII

"SEALS OF LOVE, BUT SEALED IN VAIN . . ."

NEXT day a careful selection of his articles, and pen-and-inks and water colours of mine, went off to Mr. Brennan, our publishing friend, and we anxiously awaited results. They were quick in coming. He sent for us, and this time clad as decently as our scanty wardrobes allowed—I in a new pink silk shirt of Chloe's—we went to his office. He was very nice about my illustrations, but to my joy I saw at once that he really thought the world of Peter.

The end of it all was that he commissioned us to go abroad and make a book on Provence, for a series of "Beautiful Countries" books he was issuing; I was to do pictures for it and Peter to supply the letterpress. The mere statement sounds bald, but what a magic vista it opened up!

We walked home to the Hencoop through the burnished glory of the autumn day, and as we went we discussed the book. Not only the geographical and historical interest of Provence should find place therein, but the old troubadour songs and those of Mistral, the old legends and superstitions, while above all did we hope to recapture the spirit of that time when King René and his court made Provence famous.

"We'll call it 'King René's Country,'" said Peter to me, as we entered the courtyard, which was a well for

the clear, pale sunlight, only the further side of it being hung with blue shadow. "I won't come up," he added, "I'm off to scour the second-hand book-shops for a copy of 'Aucassin and Nicolete' in the original Langue d'Oil, and I'll teach myself Provençal, too, before I'm much older."

"I know enough to stumble through 'Mireille' and 'Calendal.' We'll read them together out there. Oh, Peter—Provence with you!"

"It will be Paradise," said Peter. "No, it won't. Do you remember Aucassin's repudiation of Paradise? 'I do not wish to enter there——' How does he say it? 'There go the old cripple and the maimed man and the beggar. . . . These go into Paradise, and with them I have no part. But into Hell I would go with the fair clerk and the fair knights who died in tourneys and rich wars. . . . And there go the fair ladies who have two lovers or three beside their lords, and there go the gold and silver and the white fur and the grey.' I've always remembered that bit, Viv; isn't it stunning —'the white fur and the grey'? And he goes on to say that the harpers and minstrels and the 'king of the world' go there, and thither would he too go if he can only have Nicolete with him. D'you remember how he calls her 'Sister, fair friend'?"

"Are you insinuating," said I lightly, for there was something in Peter's tone that seemed to me more gilded than platonic, "that Provence not only isn't Paradise, but is the other place?"

"I'll tell what it's going to be for us," he replied.

"Yes?"

"Have you ever heard of a place called the 'Pays du Tendre'?" asked Peter.

The words caught at my imagination and I stared out at the courtyard till it seemed to swell and diminish again in the brightness. The Pays du Tendre! Surely one could take that much; it did not mean a lover's country, or so I thought. Vaguely I realised that it must be the happiest thing in the world, that Pays du Tendre, which is partly actual environment and partly a state of mind; happier than any time of actual engagement, far happier than a honeymoon. What I did not realise was that no one ever comes out of it with his soul his own as when he entered there.

"Viv, I'm off," broke in Peter. As a rule we hardly ever shook hands, a mere nod sufficing, but now he took both my hands and turned me towards him, saying: "Viv—would you mind——?"

I stared at him, though with the last of the sun full on my face I hardly saw him. I seemed to think a great many things at once. One was that Peter wanted to kiss me, and another ran something like this: "Perhaps I am in love with Peter and will only know it if he kisses me. Perhaps I really should begin to feel things then——" So I hesitated, and was aware of astonishment that I could even have come as far as hesitation—I, who had not only never let a man kiss me, but never felt anything but a passionate shrinking and dislike at the suggestion! But—the sun was shining, the sky arched blue overhead, a little breeze blew softly past my neck, we were so young—it seemed such a natural, such a sensible thing to kiss!

Then came the sound of an approaching footstep, and Peter said: "For Heaven's sake be quick; someone's coming to spoil it!" and I somehow gasped "Yes —but, oh, I meant never to!"

"Never mind," he said, and then suddenly his arms were round me, though quite lightly; I was caught towards him, and he kissed my cheek.

The blank disappointment of that moment! I had tilted my head back and shut my eyes as one had always imagined lovers did to get the full glory of a kiss, and I prepared to feel the world go round.

I felt nothing at all, absolutely nothing. No sensation thrilled through me. I was only aware, the next moment, of an awful sensation of something shattered for ever; even with the kiss I tasted regret.

With a quick muttered thanks Peter rushed away out of the courtyard and I fled into the uttermost recesses of the harness room and wished I'd never been born.

My one most cherished ideal was broken; I had been kissed, and nothing could ever give me virginity of cheek again. And under all that, more insistent still, was a little voice saying "If only it had been worth it! If only it had been worth it!" There was the sting—I had risked all for a hoped-for sensation and had not achieved it. I stayed in the harness room and a tumult of miserable emotions for a while, and then made my way up the ladder to the studio, where I found Jo and Chloe doing their hair for tea. Jo told me long after that they guessed at once what had happened, for I had one pale cheek and one—very pink!

CHAPTER XXVIII

ABROAD

I HAD thought that on my next meeting with Peter I should be shy and embarrassed, but as a matter of fact he turned up when I wasn't expecting him and I forgot all about it. Half an hour later I remembered, but it would have been absurd to have begun to feel shy then.

There were a great many practical arrangements to engross our attention. Chloe and Jo had decided to take one more winter in Paris, and Chas was going with them to study at Collarossi's. If Jo had consulted her pocket she would have let the studio, but then what would happen to the Changeling and Littlejohn? Peter and I could not afford to take them with us; and it was finally settled that Gladeyes was to live rent free at the Hencoop and look after the two helpless ones, for whose board we were leaving behind as much money as we very well could just then. Edgar Murdock, who all this time had stayed on the first floor of the house where Peter lodged in the attic, seemed unable to settle to anything, though he talked perpetually of emigrating. When he heard of our plans he announced he would stay on in London for the winter, so as to see us all on our return from France. Also, he added, he could keep an eye on the family at the Hencoop, as he did not consider Mrs. Grey should be left with no man to pro-

tect her, if necessary. I'm afraid I could not help smiling a little, as I recalled the timid femininity of manner which Gladeyes, quite unconsciously and by sheer instinct, always adopted with any male thing, but I was glad of the suggestion, for I feared the consequences for Edgar if he were left with no anchorage. Jo and Chloe, escorted by the Man-about (who really was a quite unworldly person), left town about a week before Peter and I, having settled our family, set off on our travels.

It was a blustering kind of day with a hint of wine-pale sunshine that had died by the time the train reached Newhaven, and we hurried across the quay and got on board. For our sins, the ship that day was a tiny French one, soon after taken off, to be knocked into scrap-iron or perhaps, puff gently up rivers, which was about all she was fit for. Outside the harbour a dark yellow sea raged, and the sky was roofed in with slate-grey clouds; my chiffon veil whipped the air viciously. We cast off, and *L'Hirondelle* shook her nose and plunged it into the rolling foam of the harbour bar. Peter and I were standing by the rail, and as she shook her whole length and reeled, I caught on to a steel rope and braced myself for the showers of spray that came sweeping over us like hail. A sailor shouted at us to go below, but I shook my head and yelled back in my best French that I preferred drowning on the deck to suffocating below it. He then assisted us to where a seat ran along the side of the after-deck house, on which a few miserable but staunch-hearted Britishers were huddled. Once we too were installed, some sailors proceeded to lash us all in with a rope, and there, for the next three or four hours, we sat, Peter and I growing hungrier and hungrier, and the other passengers sagging

forwards, their pale chins hung over the guarding rope. It was a splendid sea; I have seldom seen a finer. A stormy yellow, the heaving miles of it were scarred and blotched with livid patches of paler yellow foam; the only other colour, once the pallid, green-topped cliffs had slipped away, was the steely grey of the sky. At every lurch to port that the ship gave, we seemed to be wallowing down to a racing lather of foam, and our scuppers filled, only to send the water filming over the narrow strip of deck at us as the ship rolled to starboard. We sat there like a row of little Canutes, the baffled water never quite reaching our feet, but sent swishing back into the scuppers again at the last moment. After three hours of this kind of work, the aspect of sky and sea underwent a change, the waves fell somewhat and assumed a normal grey-green, and though we still rolled almost to the limit, it seemed possible to try and attain food. Accordingly, Peter and I wriggled out from under the rope, and by a series of calculated dashes, succeeded in making the head of the companion way, and once on the lower deck, it was comparatively easy to reach the saloon. But at the top of the stairs leading down into it, I paused in dismay. True, there were inviting-looking white cloths on the table, but on the benches! Rows of human forms lay out along them, prostrate and dumb, with closed eyes and pale green faces.

"Heavens! The place is like a morgue!" I exclaimed.

A few of the pale green lids were raised, and their owners cast a glare of concentrated dislike at me, which deepened as I called to the waiter to bring us something to eat outside. Then Peter and I staggered towards, and were suddenly violently thrown on to, a seat; and there we

attacked the food the waiter brought us, which proved, to our disgust, to consist of biscuits dubbed "thin oval captain," and soda water.

It was dusk by the time we made our very belated arrival at Dieppe, and we were hustled through the customs and into the expectant train. I felt a shock of emotion that was almost physical as I set my foot on French soil again—not since Father and I had roamed the world together had I been out of England—not for three weary years, and I felt the old, romantic tingling in my blood. As the train puffed slowly through the streets of Dieppe, and I saw the tall, old houses with their shutters folded back on their flat white faces, or closed to admit of gleams of tantalising lamplight shining through the slats, I leant out of the carriage window (in spite of the *Dangereux de se pencher au dehors* notice which adorned the ledge in brass characters and three languages). In the streets, some fishwives stood to gaze at us, their hands on their full hips; one, young and slim, wore pince-nez that glimmered in the light from our carriage as we passed her, and looked oddly out of keeping with her white, folded cap. So we creaked through Dieppe and then, gathering speed, roared out into the dark, sleeping country beyond. I sat back in my seat, but Peter stood by the open window with his arms on the ledge and gazed out, little as there was to see, for the young moon was cloud-hidden. He breathed deeply of the keen air and, like me, felt that it tasted gloriously French. Presently, he turned and spoke above the rattle of the train.

"This is the sort of country that looks sleeping," he said. "Do you know what I mean? As though it had turned over a little in its sleep, hunching its shoulder

and drawing the coverlet up over it. Not like quite flat country—that's like a corpse laid out." He turned to the window again, and remained staring out till we came to Rouen, whose myriad lights, pricking through the blue of the night, looked like a giant swarm of fireflies settled over the slope. I think after that we both slept a little, only awaking when our train steamed into the Gare Lazare, some two or three hours late.

I flung myself on Jo and Chloe, who were standing dejectedly on the damp, gloomy platform, gasping out "Feed us, women, feed us. Nothing but a 'thin oval captain' stands between us and breakfast this morning."

"What I need," opined Peter's voice, in its deepest drawl, "is a square meal in a round stomach. Lead on."

"Where are you staying?" I asked, as we all went rattling over the Paris cobbles in a taxi. "You might have deigned us a word since your departure."

"We're in the old *apartment* in the Rue d'Assas. We'll go straight there now and dump the luggage, and then sally forth in search of something to eat. We, too, have a hunger."

How the memories of gay, student days thronged on me as we went skidding along the wet boulevards, and then, at length, down the familiar, dingy Rue d'Assas! In those old days, Father and I had had a little *apartment* in the Rue Leopold Robert, but Jo and Chloe and another girl, since married, had all clung together in the Rue d'Assas, and Father and I were round there most days to see them. Jo guessed whom I was thinking of, and squeezed my hand, and just then, as the interior of the cab swam in a big tear, we drew up at the iron-studded door. The little *guichet* in it opened, and Madame Bignon herself, round, rubicund and faithless as

of yore, appeared at its dark mouth, with the pale, triangular face of Anatole, who acted both as porter and chambermaid, peering over her shoulder.

"V'la les enfants qui sont de retour!" said Madame, pressing me to her black cloth chest. She was always prodigal of affection as a set off to the total lack of any attendance bestowed on us. We tramped in single file down the queer little underground passage whose whitewashed walls always rubbed off on one's clothes, and whose roof, as one ascended the steps at the end, was liable to knock the unwary brow, and then we found ourselves once more in the familiar courtyard. It is an oblong yard, and all round it the house folds its window-pierced walls, so that only a narrow strip of sky is visible away at the top. The sun hardly ever penetrates to the yard save for a few minutes when it is practically overhead, but the grey rain visits it, dancing up into the air again from the cobbles. Jo's and Chloe's rooms ran down one side of the house; they had no communicating doors and opened right out on to the yard, so that, whatever the weather, one had to go out to pass from one room to the other. At the far end was the sitting room, and to this we all went now. It struck rather chilly in spite of the wood fire in the stove, for the floor was of uncarpeted stone; in front of the small-paned window was a plain deal table, two or three chairs to match were squeezed round it, and the rest of the room was taken up by a camp bed. On the bed, busily washing paint brushes, which he was swirling round on a cake of hollowed yellow soap, sat Chas. His head was bent over his task, and the lamplight fell on to his sleekly brushed hair. At the noise of our entrance he looked up, and rammed the brushes into an earthen-

ware jar, the soap he allowed to bound like a triumphant flea over the floor, while he himself leapt to meet us. He was looking, as usual, very well-groomed in a pale grey suit with a silvery bow-tie to match—a great contrast to Peter, who was wearing shocking old tweeds, and a felt hat like a kind of pointed pudding basin, very suggestive of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

"We've had this bed put up for Peter," said Jo. "You share my room. Chas lurks in great state up at the top of the house, where it's so light he always wakes first and comes and calls us, to whom no ray of anything brighter than a pale darkness ever penetrates. He makes awfully good coffee."

"Then he will have the pleasure of beholding my beautiful pyjamas," said I. "The peach bloomers being a little shabby, Gladeyes actually made me a new pair of a refined lilac. With silken frogs."

Chas declared he was thrilled to the bone at the prospect, and after a hasty wash we all set off to a restaurant. On our way we had to pass Collarossi's, and Jo paused and said something to Chas in an undertone of which I only caught the word "skeleton." He replied, "Not here. Madame at the Coq d'Or—her grandpa," and we were going on again when Chloe exclaimed:

"There's a 'croquis' on to-night at Collarossi's, and it shouldn't be over yet. Let's run down and see; it'll be like old times for Viv."

We began to clatter down the stairs, Peter and I last, when a sudden thought struck me. It was, of course, nothing for us painters to see a girl unclothed, but if Peter had never done so it would be a terrific revelation of beauty for him. I remembered the first time, as a child, that I ever worked from the nude, I was so over-

come by the beauty of it that I couldn't draw; it seemed sacrilege to try and reproduce that harmony of supple lines and pearly tints in crude paint. And now since Peter had kissed me I knew I didn't want him to see any girl unless he saw me. I wanted to be the one to give him that shock of keen impersonal joy. I put my hand on his arm.

"Don't come in, Peter. To please me! I'll explain after."

"Of course not, if you'd rather I didn't," said Peter simply. He went out to the front door again and I followed the others in. How the old days came sweeping back on me as I saw the model—a dark haired, Egyptian-looking creature—lying, elbow propped and chin on hands, upon the semi-circular green-baize model throne that made the flesh tints seem so pink by contrast. There was not a face I knew among the crowd of students busy over their sketch books, but Chas, who had already been studying there a few weeks, nodded to several of them. As we were going out again I heard a mysterious interchange of words, this time between him and a fat German student.

"And the skeleton?" said the latter.

"The grandpa to Madame at the Coq d'Or. We're going there, now," replied Chas.

"The skeleton! Grandpa! This is very intriguing!" thought I to myself.

CHAPTER XXIX

A SKELETON OUT OF THE CUPBOARD

WE found the Coq d'Or swept and tidied for the night, but a waiter laid a dingy cloth over a still dingier deal table, and soon we were feasting on steak and onions, followed by orange salad. At the end of the meal the waiter approached Chas and beckoned, saying in a portentous whisper:

"Madame désire vous parler—à cause de son bon-papa, vous savez." And Chas apparently quite understanding, followed him out.

When we all reassembled on the pavement, Chas was carrying a long, oddly-irregular package wrapped in an old black-and-red tablecloth. At sight of it Jo exclaimed:

"Good! You've got grandpapa!" and proceeded to take hold of one end of the bundle.

"'Ware gendarmes!" whispered Chas in a thrilling kind of stage aside. "There's one coming. I hear his horny-handed tread."

With mock horror Chloe sprang in front of the roll of red tablecloth which was now sagging limply between Jo and Chas like the body of a dead man, and her action caught the attention of the passer-by, who was not, after all, a gendarme, but one of those lean, wiry, long-haired individuals who might be student or *apache*. He slouched forward with a swift, panther-like movement,

and on the instant Jo and Chas quickened into a run, Peter, Chloë, and I acting as escort. There was no question of a race, for not only were two of us burdened, but were shrieking with laughter as well; and the newcomer circled round us for a moment, then broke into the best Montmartre lingo. As far as I could make out, he imagined we were trying to conceal some nefarious deed and was expressing his willingness not to give us away if we let him go shares in the profits. Chas stopped and proceeded, apparently, to consider the proposition, then shook his head. The *apache*-like individual grew excited, argued, threatened and finally, announcing that he was going to tell the police, padded off to do so. Chas picked up the bundle, which this time he carried as though it were an overgrown baby, and we went on. We had only gone about twenty paces when we heard the returning feet of our friend, followed by those of a gendarme. We nipped round into a doorway, and Chas stood leaning forward with the bundle in front of him. As the footsteps reached the corner he tore the tablecloth off and thrust a dancing, clattering skeleton into the faces of our pursuers. I shall never forget the effect it had. The *apache* gave a yell and fled off through the night as though the skeleton were pursuing him; the gendarme jumped, cried out, and then swore long and picturesquely. It was an awkward moment, and I, who had once, over some lost property, been involved in the intricacies of a *procès verbal,* had no wish to be *haled* off to the police station. As I seemed the only one of us to whom French came easily, I stepped into the breach. This was rendered all the more difficult for me by the fact that I knew nothing about the matter myself. Luckily it did not need much intelligence to tell that, like all

new students, Chas was in the throes of anatomy and had yearned after a skeleton from which to gain first-hand knowledge. Where the grandfather of the patronne of the "Coq d'Or" came in I couldn't for the life of me see, and so I had to do my best from imagination.

"That is my grandpapa!" I explained to the gendarme.

"Your grandpapa! But, name of a name! Do people carry their grandpapas about the streets at night, in nothing but their bones?"

"It is the only wear for the best grandpapas. Besides, see you, it is that we are artists and want to draw him. See his beautiful legs! Must he not have been a fine figure of a man?"

"A peaceable citizen should not flaunt skeletons in other people's faces in the middle of the night," persisted the gendarme obstinately.

"Ah, we have been of a stupidity," I admitted, "but what would you? We are English and new to Paris."

"English! Ah, mad English!" exclaimed the gendarme, as though that explained much.

"Also," I added cunningly, "we did not know that you, monsieur, were with that son of a fool who has been annoying us. If my grandpapa has inconvenienced you I assure you he would be the first to apologise if he only could. As it is, he would be charmed if you would drink his soul's health——" and a chink which was not that of dry bones sounded on the night air. And "Va pour le bonpapa!" said the gendarme as he took his departure.

When we were back home, Bonpapa and all, I took the others severely to task, pointing out how trying a night at the police station would have been to people

who had such a protracted crossing as Peter and myself. Chas, who took all responsibility, was duly penitent between his shrieks of mirth.

"You see," he explained, "I've been wanting a good skeleton, and happened to say so at the Coq d'Or. Madame said they'd had a beauty there for years, and it was no good to them—in fact, it languished in the cellar. She seemed vague as to how it got there, but it had been in the house such ages it was always called her grandpapa. I think she'd quite a family feeling for it. But she sold it to me. And here it is."

"Yes," I echoed, "here it is. Jo, I think I want to go to bed."

"Come along, then. I am indeed ashamed of Chas. But you've no idea how nice he can be when he's good."

After we were in bed and the light was out, Chas banged at our door on his way up to his attic.

"What is it?" we yelled.

"Only that I can't settle to sleep for excitement at thought of Viv's lilac pyjamas!" he called back.

It was a tight fit for Jo and myself in the musty walnut bed, but I should have slept soundly enough had it not been for thoughts of Bonpapa. I didn't know whether it was that I was absurdly sensitive on the subject, but the fact remained that I couldn't bear to see a human skeleton flung about and treated as a joke. A skeleton was an excellent thing to teach one anatomy, but surely it ought to be treated with reverence, even so. I had felt ashamed to say anything to the others, because I knew that nicer-minded people of finer and truer perceptions one could not wish to meet, and they seemed to feel no misgivings. It occurred to me that Peter had been very silent since the disrobing of Bonpapa, and I

wondered if perhaps he shared my feelings. When I looked at a skeleton I could not help realising how it had formed the core of a living body of flesh and blood and had been animated by a living soul; how it had lain down and risen up and walked the earth and been shaken by passions; and it seemed to me that the reverence due to a dead body belonged to this most essential and enduring part of it. At last thoughts of Bonpapa and Chas and Jo and Peter all flowed together in my brain and I slept.

I was awakened by a sound of clanking metal, and opening my eyes, I peeped cautiously over the somnolent Jo. It was a cold, grey morning, and through the flimsy muslin curtains I could see the steady glimmering downpour of the rain. The door was open, and against it the form of Chas, clad in a Burberry and a deerstalker cap, showed dark. He was engaged in emptying the bath, which Jo and I had used the preceding night, and he did so by the simple expedient of tipping it over the step into the yard. He then picked it up and noiselessly withdrew with it.

About half an hour later he reappeared, this time with coffee, which he had made himself, and crisp new rolls. These he dealt out to Jo and me as we sat up in bed to receive them, and himself sat on the foot and ate his own breakfast. "Did I not say," demanded Jo, with justifiable pride, "that he had all the domestic virtues?" He certainly looked very nice as he sat there, his pleasant boyish face beaming with good nature and delight in his Josephine. He delighted also in my pyjamas, though, as I pointed out to him, the more exciting half was of necessity still hidden.

He, Jo and Chloe all went off to Collarossi's, and

The Milky Way

Peter and I pottered round Paris, ending up with half an hour in front of the new Rodin, and it was as we went back to the Rue d'Assas that Peter broke in on the subject of Bonpapa. It gave me a thrill of intense pleasure, somehow, to realise that Peter and I had felt the same about it. His ideas were so often more rarefied than mine, just as his nature was less prosaic and practical, that I sometimes recognised sadly that there were flights of his on which I could not hope to follow.

We found we were the first to arrive home, and we went up the stairs to a large room under the roof, that Chas was using as a studio. There was no one there but Bonpapa, looming palely from a hook on which he had been hung, a lay figure crouched in a heap below him. For a moment he stood at gaze, then Peter caught my arm.

"The rugs, Viv!" he ejaculated.

"What rugs? What d'you mean?"

"Why, we're going by the *rapide* to-night—we'll take Bonpapa with us. We'll roll him up in our rugs and take him to Provence, and give him decent burial on a clean, windy mountain side. The rape of the skeleton, eh, Viv?" He unhooked Bonpapa as he spoke.

"But Peter—isn't it dishonest? It doesn't belong to us, but to Chas——"

"Belong!" snorted Peter, "how can one human being belong to another? I thought you understood he was a human being. He belongs to himself, and he has a right to six feet of good country earth, and he shall have it. We'll pray for his soul over it."

We rolled Bonpapa up in two coats and a rug and strapped him round, and when we had finished, Jo and Chloe came trooping in to take us out to dinner before

seeing us off. Chas hoped to get to the station, but wanted to put in half an hour or so at work. Hoping it was not Bonpapa whom he wished to work at, we gathered that personage up, grasped our bags, and all set off for a restaurant. At the Gare de Lyons there was no sign of Chas, and Jo and Chloe bought us papers and installed us in a carriage with three fat Frenchmen and one thin Frenchwoman. Peter put Bonpapa on the rack.

"Oh, you will want your rug," said Jo.

"I think not," said Peter, and at the thought of unrolling Bonpapa before those comfortable looking members of the *bourgoisie,* I could not resist a gurgle of laughter. Just as the train was beginning to pull itself together, preparatory to departure, Chas rushed up the platform. His hair was not so well brushed as usual, and his tie was disorganised.

"There you are! Just in time to say good-bye to them," cried Jo. Chas only shrieked "Grandpapa! Grandpapa!" as he panted alongside the moving carriage.

"What about him?" we shrieked back hypocritically.

"He's gone! All by himself! Madame Bignon swears she hasn't touched him! And he's clean gone——"

"And so are we, thank goodness!" murmured Peter, as he sank back on the seat.

All night long the train ran on through inundated country, where the floods lay almost level with the rails, and the roofs of little houses peeped through it like strange fungi that had sprung up at a touch. All night long the water chuckled in the foot-warmers, and over the faces of the sleeping Frenchmen opposite the shadow

of the swinging lamp-tassel passed back and forth like a ghostly pendulum. And all night I alternately slept and woke with my head on Peter's shoulder, with his thin, strong arm round me, while Bonpapa lay, rug-hidden, in the rack.

Next day we alighted at an insignificant little station between Antibes and Nice, and leaving our luggage to follow by diligence, we shouldered Bonpapa and a modest bag, and started on foot to go up to our destination, a little walled town high in the mountains. Seeing a promising young path, we branched off among the olive terraces, and at last found a stretch of wilder hillside, where, in the sun, we buried Bonpapa, beneath some myrtle bushes dislodged for the purpose, and then planted again. We piled small limestone crags round their roots and made a cross of them at his head; then said a prayer for his soul; but we never told Chas or Jo or Chloe how it was that he had taken to himself wings, and deserted the attic in the Rue d'Assas.

CHAPTER XXX

I GET ME TO A NUNNERY

ON looking back at the time we spent in the Alpes Maritimes, it seems to fall into as definite an atmosphere as though it were enclosed in a magic bubble. It is even distinct from the rest of the Provençal period, which we spent wandering through the sunny, faintly coloured land that stretches from Marseilles to Avignon, though that, too, was wonderful; but everyone is either mountain lover or plain lover, and Peter and I discovered we were both of the former. In this magic bubble, until memory peers into it in detail, a few impressions stand out more vividly than others, or rather, are nearer to the surface. Queer little impressions, some of them, yet all things, trivial in themselves, that went to make up life that winter. The smell of the smouldering fir cones that came from the glossy, green-tiled stove in the dining room, the more pricking odour that blew in gusts on to me in my bedroom, when my wood fire was lighted of an evening. (And here I may mention, in passing, that wood fires have held no charm for me since. Turn your back for a moment and they go out, leaving you to wrestle with inadequate bellows and the fir cones, which are the only things the nuns grudge, as though they were heart's blood. A wood fire is very pleasant at its best, but it's one woman's work to keep it up to the mark.) The sight of the nuns out in the

long, walled garden, with wide black straw hats put on over their flowing veils, so that they looked oddly like ebon cardinals; the glimpse I once had of Sœur Isabelle coming towards me down the path, the sun behind her, so that her face, framed in its white gimp, and her long slim neck, where the linen was closely swathed, showed darker than her black veil; the fall of which from crown to shoulders on either side was rendered transparent by the sunlight—a thin, vibrant half-tone between the solid shadow made by her graceful head and neck, and the brilliant lightness of the sun-bathed garden. I never saw anything that was at once so lovely and so paintable—the lovely things are often untranslatable in paint. The flickering of the dusty-brown lizards over the paths; the glitter of the olive foliage as it caught wind and sun; the feel of the loose stones on the wilder mountain sides, slipping and crunching under one's feet; and the two curiously distinct effects of the Alpes Maritimes—the effect of little, medieval towns with dim, brown roofs fluted by rain-stained purple, with shutter-winged windows, and towers and turrets pricked against the sky; and the effect, almost as fascinating in its way, of the little modern villas set in their prim gardens of cacti and mimosa, their whitewashed walls decorated with a frieze of painted flowers, and their gaudy doorways flanked by enormous dragons in turquoise china; these are the things, with an impression of sunshine over all, which go to make up the memory of that time in the mountains. There was a bad spell, of course, when for one dreadful week the snow lay even in the valleys, and all day long the frozen sleet beat past the window, whilst I nearly congealed in my little north room with its stone floor, for I could only afford to light my fire

at night. During the day I sat wrapped up in my coat and the eiderdown, my feet on a chaufferette, and my blue fingers guiding a quivering brush, as I "sheeked" illustrations from the sketches done in sunnier moments. Yet I have to gaze very deep into my bubble to find that week—it has no place in the prevailing atmosphere.

From my window I saw the old walled garden, where the convent linen swayed back and forth from the fruit trees, through a sidling chequer-work of shadow and rounds of sun, and on clear days I could catch a gleam of sea, miles away and below, beyond the descending ranges. Peter lurked at a grubby little inn called "The Café de L'Univers et du Portugal"—why Portugal was *thus* dragged in by the heels I never could imagine—and he looked across the market square, through the pencilled silver of the naked plane-tree boughs, to where the mountains rose beyond the roofs—fold on fold, and peak and peak on peak, till their tawny rock and scrub of myrtle gave way to bleaker heights still, while highest and furthest of all, gleamed the snow peaks.

Yes—it was a wonderful little town, but even there life was not entirely lyrical. Humour is never the highest poetry, though it is the salt of life, and of humour I think a convent produces its fair share. The nuns themselves were charming—they were simple-minded, without that aggressive cheeriness and readiness to be bright at trifles which one finds in an English convent; they were child-like, but not in the least childish. The boarders, however, were of a different breed. Like myself, they were unattached spinsters with slender purses, and they consisted of a couple of Americans, three French, and, besides myself, two English women. We all had a deadly likeness to each other—I used to feel

the sameness growing more and more pervading, and it took long tramps over the mountains, with sound sleeps among the friendly myrtle bushes, to keep me at all free of it.

There is a type of woman, not of any one nationality, who flocks with those of her own feather, both by instinct and circumstances—the type of the elderly spinster. And here, let me hasten to say, that I do not necessarily mean by this, an unmarried woman. The true elderly spinster is born so; she can be of either sex, and married or single. It is a cast of mind, and to it nearly all of us boarders conformed. In all the more frequented of the hill towns that lie behind the fashionable sea-board, there is a convent-pension, where the wandering woman rests for a while at as few francs a day as possible, for she is seldom well-off, generally possessing that incompetency spoken of by her male relatives as "quite a nice income for a woman."

Of the English women, one alone did not fall into this type, and she was charming—the kind of English woman who has iron-grey hair, humorous eyes, and an appreciation of beauty that makes her travel in discomfort sooner than not at all. She lent me a rubber bath, but that is another story. Next to her, at the head of the table, sat the other specimen of our race—a gaunt, spectacled female, with oily hair, and a dark stuff dress with a "tucker" in the unyielding collar of it. She had a genius for crushing all conversation by remarking simply and heavily, "You cannot possibly mean what you say," a thing she invariably said to me, whom she detested. A gloomy soul, she never admired anything, and on those wonderful days of southern spring, when the clear, pale sky seems literally to sparkle with light,

she would murmur, "It's not what I call blue. I expected the sky to be Reckitt's blue. It ought to be Reckitt's blue." And she called it "Rickitt's" at that.

Conversation with her was apt to take the form of an Ollendorf exercise, do what one would.

"You have a room due south, haven't you?" I would venture.

"Yes, but the stove burns badly, so I am never warm."

"But you haven't caught cold, have you?"

"No, I have not caught a cold, but I have the rheumatism."

On the left, opposite the nice Englishwoman and next to me, sat one of the French ladies. She was dowdy with that triumphant dowdiness it takes a Frenchwoman to attain, she had an egg-shaped bust, and arranged her sleekly watered hair over her forehead in what is, I believe, known as a "Piccadilly dip." She was chiefly remarkable for having a nephew—a bullet-headed young soldier, with pale hair so closely shorn that the pink of his skull showed through. Sometimes this youth was allowed to come and lunch, but though there was an empty seat at table he was not allowed to grace it. No, he was put at a little side table with his back to us, and ate his *déjeuner* in solitary state, while we could only gaze in regretful admiration at his blue coat and his beautiful red trousers. Apart from her nephew, no particular interest attached to this lady—she was above everything, in that room of lone, lorn females, an Aunt.

On my other side, for my sins, sat one of the Americans. The other American was as charming as the nice Englishwoman—alarmingly cultured, it is true, with a little notebook in which she put down anything that

struck her, but with the ease and polish and true kindliness that the best Americans have, perhaps, more strongly than the members of any other nation. But, alas! she who sat next me was not of that kind, and she added to a habit of sucking her false teeth till they clicked, another habit which she called "saving up for the next course." This consisted of piling up remnants of the last dish upon her bread, and then transferring them, in a congealed state, to her next plate, no matter what that contained. "I can make most anything go together," she would say placidly, spreading cold fried carrots on her cheese, and when I rashly suggested she should try wine over the lot, she tipped her red *vin ordinaire* on to the plate, and consumed the concoction with relish. I think we all felt the limit had come when she saved mayonnaise sauce on her bread in limp creamy festoons, and finally, with an anticipatory click of her ghoulish teeth, transferred it to a baked apple.

The two remaining French women were old darlings, though they took some knowing, but having once admitted me to their hearts, they spoiled me thoroughly. However, they did not unbend all at once, and Christmas was an ordeal over which I still laugh. On the Eve I was late for dinner, having stopped on my way back from a tramp in the mountains at the florists' shop. There in the damp coolness of it, with the girls busily packing at the long tables and the air filled with the bitter-sweet smell of newly-cut rose stems, I bought seven bunches of violets and an armful of the tightly furled little red rosebuds that look more like bundles of radishes than anything else, until they open into velvety sweetness. The roses were for the nuns to put in the chapel, but the violets I destined for my fellow-

boarders. Being late, I leapt straight into the dining room as I was, with snow on my hat and coat, and my face tingling from my walk, the violets heaped in my arms.

In the midst of a ghastly silence, I began to go round the table, laying an offering by each plate. I deposited the first bunch, with an appropriate little speech, by the lady of the Piccadilly dip, who was too overcome by surprise, or some other emotion, to utter a word, and her example must have been infectious—the flowers were received in silence—save for an inarticulate gurgle of hysteria from my nice Englishwoman, whose eye I dared not catch. That table seemed miles long, and I worked down one side of it in stony embarrassment, but by the time I had progressed up the other and arrived at the spectacled one, I was quite enjoying it, and she nearly choked with spleen at having to accept anything from so frivolous a person as myself. And at last, when, somewhat flushed but considerably less agonised than the rest of the company, I sank back in my own seat, I realised I wouldn't have missed the affair for anything.

By Twelfth Night we all knew each other better, and, with the exception of the spectacled one and she of the movable teeth, kept up an animated chatter at meal-times, yet somehow on that day the depression of the thing—of these drifting women, their aimless lives and futility—caught at me and would not let go. The *déjeuner* began gaily, because it was a feast day, and that meant coffee, and besides that there was the excitement of the *Gateau des Trois Rois*. We were all worked up over this, because each of us hoped to find in her slice one of the little china figures. Why it is called the Cake of the Three Kings I don't know (except,

of course, to celebrate the Epiphany, for the little figures consist of a tiny bearded man, a woman with flowing hair, and a baby.

One of my two dear old French ladies (the one who was fabulously ancient, had a bristling white beard and a bosom on which the large jet buttons lay like plates on a shelf) nearly swallowed the baby. She retrieved it by a method admirably simple and direct, and made a little throne for it in her bread. The baby was quite naked, and welded as one soul with a bright green tree-trunk. The King and Queen fell to the Americans, one of whom at once remarked that she must make a note in her journal of such a curious custom, while the other opined it was a pity the figures weren't made of sugar. And then, why I don't know, the futility and horror of the whole crowd of us bore down on me.

"You do not eat, you cannot be well, Mees Veev," cried one of the old French ladies. "You must come to my room after *déjeuner,* and I will give you a tonic and some biscuits."

"One would say you were her mother, the way you fuss over her!" grumbled the fabulously old lady.

"So I am her mother," declared the first dauntlessly.

"No more than I am," snapped the aged one.

"You are both my mothers, and I adore you," said I hastily. But I could not escape the tonic—which took the form of a secret bottle of Benedictine from a cupboard; and, not to be behindhand, the very old lady called me into *her* room, and insisted on pouring a lot of quinine hair restorer on to the top of my head. "That will make you feel better," she cooed, stirring it round on my crown with a fat white finger. In her cupboard too was a secret store of eatables, and I had

to refuse a strange assortment of them, ranging from liquorice drops to potted meat. I began to see that these stores made part of the life of a lone woman—that when unhappy or bored, she held a private orgy of sweet biscuits and throat pastilles, and this was the crowning touch to my depression. I fled to my own room, where a tiny square of sun made a glowing patch on the red-tiled floor; outside the sky showed a clear vibrant blue, and a young soft wind met my heated cheeks.

A knock at the door, and the little shiny-faced, bright-eyed lay-sister who waited on us, peeped in to inform me that "Monsieur mon ami" had arrived to take me out. I crammed on the jaunty little leather hat that was the admiration of the nuns, cast my painting things into my rücksack, and in another moment was through the house, where the smell of dinner still held the air, and in the sweet-scented out-of-doors with Peter.

CHAPTER XXXI

MOSTLY ON FOOD AND MONEY

WE were bound for some ruins that crested one of the mountain crags far up behind the town, the ruins of a Templars' fortress, where the knights used to wage war upon the pirates who came up from the seaboard. Peter slung my painting things over his shoulder, and we set off up the winding mountain road, leaving our little ringed city below, passing the gay, modern, painted villas set back among semi-tropical foliage; then, higher up, past occasional little typical Provençal farmhouses, washed a faded ochre, with a dusty-brown fluted roof and narrow piercings for windows, sometimes with a naked vine sprawling like a net over the poles that made a kind of airy loggia in front, the pattern of it exactly repeated in shadow over the hard-stamped earth. Beneath the loggia there was always a yellow-eyed black-and-white dog that barked itself sideways as we passed. Still higher we went, till mile upon mile of mountain ranges lay below us, sloping away to the line of blue, soft as a bird's wing, which told of the distant Mediterranean. Leaving the road, we climbed up the slippery turf, clutching at bare young thorn and almond trees, till we reached the Templars'. The ruined walls were mostly only a couple of feet in height, so that they made a kind of ground plan of what the fortress must have been; only here and there, as on a jutting crag several

feet below us, the shell of a turret stood up against the sky, the old stonework of it a light golden-buff in the sunshine.

Having unpacked my painting things, Peter ensconced himself in one of the little "rooms," where the grass made a close-fitting carpet, his writing pad on his knee, and for a couple of hours we worked in silence.

There is nothing like sweat. By the end of the first half hour the excitement of work was thrilling me to the exclusion of that terrible convent atmosphere, and by the time the sun had moved so far that it was no longer possible to pursue my effect, I felt enough at peace to pour out the whole affair to Peter.

"The oppression of it's been growing on me, of course," I ended; "to-day at *déjeuner* it somehow came to a head, but each night's been pretty bad. The dining room's badly lit, and that green stove is chillsome, and under everyone's plate lies a pool of shadow. And we're all—*en masse*—so footling. And to-day it all seemed awful—when I looked round at us. And I thought if any of us died to-morrow, we might just as well not have lived. If any one of these hide-bound, prim, good, rather catty souls would only produce an infant that she didn't ought to have had, I should say all the rest of us ought to go down on our knees to her. At least she'd have had courage. Oh, oh, oh, the greyness of it!"

"Have an apple," advised Peter, burrowing in his pocket.

"Don't talk to me of food. Those cupboards were the last straw, the finishing touch. All that secret food —it seemed positively obscene. Well, it does smell rather good—if you'll halve it with me——"

The Milky Way

I enjoyed the juicy scrunch with which my teeth sank into my half of the apple.

"It's no good," I said, "I never shall be able to refuse food. That's the penalty you pay for ever not having had enough of it."

"I know," replied Peter, "it alters your whole point of view. If you've ever been starving——"

"I never have, but for a long stretch together I've not had enough to eat."

"The mental effect is the same. It's such a tremendous indictment of civilisation, such an upsetting and readjusting of standards. One never, no matter how wealthy one may become, can look at food in the same way again. It has become sacred. Some day I'm going to write a paper called 'On Common Food as a Sacrament.' I've learned a lot of out-of-the-way things about it—one is that its filling capacity comes before nourishment. If you're really hungry you'll stuff on biscuits sooner than eat concentrated meat tablets."

"Yes, and the funny thing is that, no matter if you know your to-morrow's dinner is absolutely assured to you, you still can't do away with the insistent little feeling 'I must eat all I can, in case I don't get any more.' And so one lives in a state of over-eating. Whenever I get the chance I eat till I get that bulgy stiff feeling. One never trusts food, so to speak, when once one has learnt not to."

"Trust is just what we want over money too," declared Peter, sitting upright in excitement and sending his apple core hurtling over the abyss at our feet; "the way people look at money is so immoral. Very few things are immoral, just as very few things are moral, because most things are beautiful, and then such a ques-

tion doesn't enter in. But you can treat money in a most immoral way; I'm sure of it."

I listened in respectful silence, because I had known for some time now that Peter had inherited a fixed income, with which he declined to have anything to do. When he had first told me, I thought it must be because the money came from *pâté de foie gras* or sweated industries, but I found it was that he considered the whole idea of a settled, unearned income, immoral.

"It's the strongest line of demarcation in the world," he now said, "that between the people who earn their whole income, however large, and those who have a certain income, no matter how small, to fall back on. It's a far stronger line than that between 'upper' and 'lower' classes, or between rich and poor, or even educated and uneducated, because it means the difference of the whole point of view. The one class cultivates the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, the second is agreeably conscious that it has no need to."

"But," I objected, "people who have nothing but their own exertions to look forward to don't think about it like that at all. They insure and save up and invest, and the thought of the future is a nightmare to them."

"Oh, that's just the pity of it. They are the heirs of all the ages, if they only knew. Once you can realise it and not worry any more, you are the only perfectly free creature. A man with money can't be free, that stands to reason. And I don't see how one can justify making investments."

"One can't, except that as other people are doing it one must do it too. If only everyone worked hard just the same, but no one invested but gave the money round as they went on, no one would ever starve or

need workhouses. I suppose it's one of those things that can't be done because it would need everybody."

"And yet it would be an absolutely practical solution, if they only would. You could live on the fat of the land and yet save your soul alive," replied Peter.

"I wonder if most people wouldn't think it rather absurd to say salvation lies in having no assured income," I mused.

"Absurd? Of course it is absurd. All counsels of perfection are absurd. The Sermon on the Mount's absurd. That's why it's divine. 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect'—that's not only absurd, but impossible, and He knew it when He said it. In its impossibility, in its divine absurdity, its the utterance of a God to men who should be gods. It doesn't matter a bit that they can't, as long as they want to be."

"But they never will be, you know," I objected. "No one, except a few isolated religious here and there, will ever act literally upon the Sermon on the Mount. And even religious don't, because they build convents and monasteries."

"Perhaps no one ever will—perhaps it's even certain that the whole world never will, but that's no reason for denying the perfection of it. And, of course, economically and actually, it would revolutionise the world. There's no denying that. Oh, what I'll write some day! For it's wonderful what a good ink necessity is, to put it on the lowest grounds. But, you see, I want to make the other people who only earn from day to day realise there's nothing to worry about. Of course, no one would worry for themselves; it's only for their wives and children they worry. And they needn't. When we're all pulling together, no one will be allowed to

starve. And if you're a Christian at all, you are bound to admit, not only the beauty, but the inevitable rightness of it."

A fresh breeze sighed past my ear, and I stretched my arms wide, wide, to breathe it in, and as my muscles relaxed again I felt myself fit into the curves of the earth and felt it bear me up. It was a good feeling, and good, too, was the sight of the slim young oak saplings growing among the ruins, the coppery last year's leaves still on their twigs, seeming, in the sunlight, to burn against the blue of the sky. All these things were gifts to us, and worth the whole length of the glaring Riviera at the horizon.

"There's so much!" I exclaimed, elliptically, "and one is so free and at large in it. Don't you feel much freer without your money, Peter?"

"Don't I? It's like having wings."

"You remember when I first met you, Peter, that evening on the *Chough?*"

"Rather. You gave me a pasty. Food again, you see!"

"Well, the afternoon before, when I watched the *Chough* coming in, I had only one heartfelt wish in the world, and that was for a hundred a year, settled and immutable, of my own. And now I have grown to be glad I haven't. It does make one trust less, having money, because there's less need to trust."

We lay for a while longer, till the valleys filled with dusk and the mountain peaks stood up into the fiery glamour that holds the southern world for a few enchanted minutes before the cold steel-blue of night; and when the glow that filled the air and refracted from leaf and stone and the blown hair about our eyes, fell sud-

denly into that chill blueness, we shouldered our traps and set off down the mountain, swinging home along the winding road that glimmered palely at us through the deepening dusk, the sweet breath of violets and stocks mingling with the faint smell of dust as we went. Peter filled my pockets with pines he had collected for my fire, and I went into my convent, with the whole golden afternoon in my mind.

There had been a treat prepared for me in my absence, and when I learned what it was, I fell on La Chère Mère's nicely starched gimp in my joy. It appeared that my supposed indisposition had been confided to the nuns by my mothers, and they had all consulted as to what would give me most pleasure. As with one voice they had all exclaimed "The bath!"

This matter of a bath is no simple thing at a convent, and I had wrestled with more difficulties than the other boarders, because the majority seemed to regard a bath as a perilous undertaking before which one should make one's will and bid farewell to one's relations. I had nearly caught my young death by leaping through the garden every morning (clad in a yellow silk kimono all over dragons, which I consider was a liberal education for the gardener), to take a cold plunge in the outdoor *salle de bain*. For the evenings, my nice Englishwoman had charitably lent me her rubber bath—a limp, boneless thing, that was quite apt to collapse suddenly, and allow one's hard-earned hot water to escape in three different directions at once. Yet what a boon it was—if only to see the maid wrestling with it of a morning.

"You fold it up like a cocked hat," I would inform her, peering over the bedclothes, "and let the water escape at one corner." But the unfortunate Lizette was

always worsted, the bath doubling up and opening out and dimpling in, wherever her hands were not, and the water flowing profusely over the floor; while Lizette never failed to keep up a little litany of "Mon Dieu, quelle misère! Quelle misère! Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu, quelle misère!"

Then, at the New Year, the construction of the indoor *salle de bain* was brought to a triumphant conclusion, amid the awed admiration of nuns and boarders. It only remained to find someone willing to risk her life in it—like St. Lawrence and his gridiron, the thing was apparently heated from below in a manner that threatened to boil the intrepid bather alive. Eventually, La Chère Mère, in tones befitting the leader of a forlorn hope, announced that she herself would try it, which she did with much aplomb, and the bathing season was thus formally declared open. But, alas, it cost two-francs fifty a time to dally with this bath, and hence it was not for me. Now I found it all heated and ready—I was to have it as a treat, absolutely for nothing!

I rushed into that *salle de bain,* sponge in hand, to find the little lay sister arranging a large, sheet-like garment ready for my occupation of it in the bath—a garment that wraps you round like a wet shroud, and prevents you using any soap, whilst fulfilling its office of hiding from the Almighty the indecent spectacle He has created.

She stood with it in her hands, gazing at me for a moment, then her shiny cheeks rounded themselves in a smile.

"You will, perhaps, not use this?" she queried. "The English, I believe, do not care about it."

"You have guessed it in one," I informed her. But

CHAPTER XXXII

I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND

THE beginning of February found us bidding farewell to the Alpes Maritimes, to the Café de l'Univers et du Portugal and the Villa Lamartine. Not that we had stayed in those abodes for the whole of our time, for being unable to afford motors we had had to tramp on foot to the remoter wonder-towns, and then—still without scandalising those nice-minded nuns—*il fallût que je decouchasse.*

Peter was by no means making an ordinary travel-book of "In King René's Country," and I fear the conscientious tourist might have found great gaps in the information contained therein. But, on the other hand, he gleaned the nicest things from heaven knows where. To those who possess the well-regulated mind of the tourist it may be of interest to know that the Chateau du Caire, at Tourettes, belonged successively to Masséna and Maréchal Reille; that Vence has been the stronghold both of knights and pirates, and has given a bishop to the see of Rome; but for the casual wanderer of no fixed bourne—the vagrant of a light heart and purse—it is a far more illuminating truth that he should shun all people whose eyebrows meet in a thick bar, because they are of the blood of the *loupgarou.* From the purely material point of view, Saint-Jeannet is famous for its grapes, and along the roadside hang the serried

bunches, swaddled in paper bags and looking curiously like rows of plucked pigeons; but to the eye of memory Saint-Jeannet is the little town of a medieval manuscript in concrete form. The fortifications of Saint-Paul are considered by architects to be even more perfect than those of Carcassonne or Nuremburg, but better than the actual technical knowledge—though that too is good, for technique understood is one of the deepest of pleasures—is the expectation of meeting at each turn those long-legged, hose-clad boys and steel-breasted men-at-arms which old illuminations show as manning just such walls as these.

Peter had a theory that Tourettes, Saint-Jeannet, Carros, Gattieres (the magic of the names of them!) was each a fairy city, fallen on bad days, it is true, but holding its breath, so to speak, in a husk of dirt and ashes till it can discover itself to a world grown simple-minded once again. And it is true that even now the boys who whistle their careless way round corners and down the slopes are of another age—brown-necked and bold-eyed, with the definitely modelled cheekbones, small chins and pointed teeth that suggest the faun. Peter the faun-like was indeed in his element here, and sometimes I had queer little moments when I felt almost jealous of the country's comprehension of him.

The night before my last at the convent Peter and I spent at a little inn in a town overhanging the Var; we rose early and went out into the dawning. Strong and stout, the sweeping ramparts of this town reared up from the projecting crags, and past them raged the relentless wind that blows down the Var as down a tunnel. We clung to the battlements for a minute, staring down through the glimmering dawn light at the bed

of the river, where only a few streamlets, with here and there an agitated patch of shallower water tortured by wind and currents, patterned the grey of the pebbly bed with brightness. The snows had not yet melted; when they did the Var would rush full and blue along her beautiful winding course. Peter, holding his pudding-basin hat down over his ears like a poke bonnet, led the way to the more sheltered mountain side, and we scrambled up it, climbing from terrace to terrace where the twisted olives paled and whispered, and when these gave place to a wilder slope, covered with myrtle, we sat ourselves down.

"Listen!" said Peter suddenly, holding up his hand, "the pipes of a satyr. D'you hear them?"

Thin and faint at first, then rounder and fuller, came a plaintive little air, accompanied by a sound as of a heavy rainfall. I knew that noise well—having often heard it behind the convent wall—it was the noise made by the hoofs of many sheep pattering along the road. Peter and I pushed through the bushes till we came to where they leaned over a steep curve of road, and there we saw pouring down it a flock of the deep golden-brown sheep of the country—mere dark shadows at that colourless hour, and followed by the piping satyr.

"As you see," observed Peter, "he has hidden his cloven hoofs in heavy shoes and tucked his tail neatly away in a blue blouse, but that's only part of the great conspiracy. That's the fun of this country—it's keeping a secret, biding its time. It doesn't matter how reverent and receptive you are, you can only see the surface of things here, and if you're intuitive enough, make a guess at the rest. Those people—these dark, sleek-haired women and bright-eyed boys, and these burnt-out

old men, they've got a heritage of romance that amounts to an added soul. They may know it themselves, and be laughing in their sleeves, or they may think they've forgotten. It doesn't matter—the great thing is that a wonderful spiritual fairy something is here."

"There's an old legend in Cornwall," said I, "which tells of some magic eye-salve, which, if you can only get hold of it, enables you to see the spirit cities. You see delicate palaces, booths piled with jewels, knights and ladies in lovely attire, but if you're discovered, one of the Little People touches your eye, and you see nothing but wilted thorns and leaves that eddy on the moor."

"Oh, for that eye-salve!" said Peter. "What mightn't we see here, Viv! Just think—perhaps all these fields of violets and stocks, and these tangles of roses, may be the fairy folk of Provence in disguise. Old Andrew Marvell would have thought so, any way, and thought them the better for the change. Doesn't he say something to that effect?"

> "Apollo haunted Daphne so,
> Only that she might laurel grow;
> And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
> Not as a nymph, but for a reed,"

I quoted; sticking a sprig of myrtle in my button-hole.

"Just so. Viv, do you realise that to-morrow we once more move on? That we leave the Alpes Maritimes, twitch our Harris-tweed mantles, and set off for pastures new?"

"I do. Let us sit down again and desecrate the dawn with a cigarette."

"It is our form of incense, none the worse for being modern. Shall you be sorry to leave?"

"Of course, for some things," I replied, "but I'm so looking forward to tramping up to Avignon. Oh, think of it, Peter, with Mistral in our knapsacks, for perusal of an evening, and Henri Fabre in our hands, to refer to a thousand times as we go. Do you think we shall hap on a Banded Epeira or trace the titmouse to its haunts?"

"Perhaps. I'm not sorry to be going because I'm so glad to have had all this, and what one has once had one has for always. Besides, I should itch if I stayed in one place!"

"If Providence, like some titanic and ghostly policeman, didn't always move me on," I replied, "I should never have budged. I'm one of those who always prefer the ills I have to flying to good I know not of. Not that there've been any ills here. To-night the nuns are providing coffee in my honour, although it's a *jour maigre,* which means we shall dine off a boiled egg, and a couple of ice-wafers with 'H & P' imprinted on their fair young faces. Such a feeling of home-sickness that gave me when I first saw it."

"Don't talk," said Peter. "Look."

We were sitting, our legs dangling, at the edge of an overhanging spur of cliff; at our backs rose a wood of larches and young oaks; far below us the Var's mazy inter-threadings were growing ever brighter, at a distant curve one of those magnificent viaducts only the French build, showed like a flung cobweb through a faint haze of mist. As we watched, the grey and silver of the Var and its bed, the soft blue of the woody shadows on the further side, and the very air itself, became suffused with the merest breath of a more vital hue—the whole of the grey-blue world, that here and

there had a steely glimmer as though under water, began to flush at the approach of day.

I could have wrung my hands in my desire to stop that growing rose-colour which would soon turn to gold and flood everything, for though I'd been talking of this and that to Peter, the half-light which had seemed to call into being a half-world, was the most glamorous, enchanted, all-to-one-self-and-one-other thing ever created. I sprang to my feet and ran off through the wood.

The wood still held the steel-blueness in incredible strength—a colour as chill and piercing as a sword blade. The distances between the slim tree-trunks were opaque with it, the larches, which from their thousands of fine downward-hanging filaments always give an effect of mist, seemed like ghost-trees, and from a dark blur of undergrowth I disturbed an owl, that sailed out and away noiselessly on its down-edged wings. The exquisite quietness of that dawn-filled wood!

I ran on and suddenly came, through a thinner growth of trees, to where a hollow cupped a big and dimly bright still pool. I was standing gazing down at it, when Peter caught up with me, and slipping a friendly arm round my shoulders, stood quietly also.

I have heard that long staring at any bright object acts hypnotically on the brain, and all I can say is if it is always as productive of clearness of vision as my gazing at the pool that morning, it is a thing we should all indulge in occasionally. For the first time I felt Peter.

It was not only that I realised suddenly that Peter was indispensable to me, that no one else could ever fill such a big place in my life, it was not even that I felt for him and with him more acutely than ever be-

fore; I was so fused with him as, actually to be him, himself. For one dizzying moment, mental vision triumphed over physical, as, in the effort to be in his mind, I imagined the pool, the grey lava slopes beyond, and a drooping curve of young sapling, with the slight difference they would all take on from his point of view. He would see more of that cluster of purplish fungi to the far side of the sapling than I—it was intimacy in its keenest, and though the intensity of it could not last, and indeed at that moment began to drop into a quiet content, yet, as Peter had said, what one has once had one had for always. It was much the same as the flight of a field-lark—the bird soars up and up, singing; then, at the outermost edge of ecstasy, drops to the nest; yet the pattern of the air-currents is changed, the vibrations made by his wings and the notes of his song go on and on in waves, invisible and soundless. Or at least I imagined them doing so.

"Oh, Peter," I said, at last, "how clean it all is! How clean! It's a sort of end of the world, where everything is clean and quiet and cold. I must bathe in the pool. You bathe too."

I slipped out of my clothes among the trees, but quick as I was a splash told me Peter was ahead of me. Leaving my garments in a fairy ring as they fell off me, I swung myself down a boulder and touched the water with a tentative foot, over which the ripples made by Peter's strong swimming eddied up. Then I, too, slid into the water, deeper and deeper, till I felt the cold circle of it around my neck.

I swam to the far side of the pool, because I wanted to get away from the trees. For on this other side were no tricks of light and shade or mistiness of foliage,

but bare, wide slopes of ridged lava, great rounded tongues of it coming down to the pool, above them only the sky; and, in the coldness and purity of the place and hour, this bathing in a dawn-pool had a quality of sacramental cleansing which called for the austerity of the open. We swam side by side, and as we went, quivering flakes of brightness broke and rippled away in an arrowy flight on either hand, and when I drew myself up on to a lava slope, I saw the drops fall off me in a pearly shower.

"Oh, Viv, it's the loveliest thing in the world," said Peter. "You always told me it was, and it is. You're a little ghost—Viv, you glimmer so white."

"Hush a moment," I whispered, lifting a warning finger, for from my higher position I could see the fiery rim of the sun growing up behind the range on the far bank of the river. The blueness sank into the earth like moisture, and the brightening air turned faintly but surely gold. A minute more, and I saw the curve of my doubled knees, that had shown pale against the grey lava as I sat sideways on the slope, become rose-coloured.

"Oh, the sun's good, too!" cried Peter, stretching, so that the water flew from off him. "D'you know what I've discovered, Viv?"

"No; what?"

"That beauty is the loveliest thing in the world!"

"I've discovered that it's most frightfully cold here," said I, with a prosaic shiver. "I will do a dance to the sun all the way to my clo'."

And I ran round the pool, leaping, to dry myself, but Peter stood still for a moment, a slim, pale-bronze figure, stretching himself towards the glow of the sunrise.

When I was ready, even to the tying of my tie, and

I ran out to find him, he was dressed, but his hair was sticking straight up with wetness, like the horn of a unicorn. I pressed it firmly down, and tried to part it in the way it should go; then:

"Peter, I *do* love you," I said; "and how odd it all is, and how different from what one always imagined!"

"In what way?" asked Peter, rubbing his cheek against the top of my head, a proceeding which forced me to speak in to his chest.

"Well, there're no thrills. I don't know that I've ever formulated to myself what thrills are, but I know that I always vaguely but firmly considered them inseparable from caring for anyone as much as I do for you."

Peter turned my face up by taking my chin between his finger and thumb.

"For instance," I elaborated, "I don't want you to kiss me a bit. I wouldn't mind, but it seems so superfluous and unnecessary."

"That's because, unlike most people, who begin at the trimmings and work up to the essentials, you begin at the essentials and work outward to the trimmings," explained Peter.

"Do I? I wonder. Everything always seems to happen in steps, so to speak. It's like improving in one's work. One doesn't go up a gradual slope of progress, but quite suddenly, after a long sticking in one place, finds one is up another step. Well, I've gone up a step with you this morning. I couldn't ever be embarrassed about anything with you, anything that wasn't ugly, because I feel so much you. Not with you or for you, but you. As though the word 'I' ought to be split in

two for us. It seems absurd to say 'you' to you, if you see what I mean."

"Yes, I know. And I won't kiss you. But don't you think perhaps you might kiss me?"

I flung my arms round his neck and kissed him in the middle of one cheek, and it felt quite natural and ordinary so to do, which showed me I had indeed gone up a step.

"Oh, Peter, you want shaving!" I exclaimed, "and I want my breakfast. I'm so dreadfully hungry."

"Poor little beast!" said Peter sympathetically. "Here, catch hold, and we'll run for it."

We stayed ourselves with coffee and rolls at the inn, and then set out for home on the heels of the new day.

CHAPTER XXXIII

VIA AMORIS

(1) *The Court of Love*

ON the following morning I bade a fond farewell to my convent, and prepared to take to the road once more. La Chère Mère called me into the deserted dining-room and bade me choose from a pile of little white metal *porte-bonheurs* that lay upon the table. I turned them over and found that, it not being England, each of these tiny medallions, which one could have bought for fifty centimes apiece, were beautiful in design, and I hesitated amongst them. Peter, who was actually included in this gift-making, chose a Jeanne d'Arc, but La Chère Mère finally herself settled on a *Sainte Famille* for me, because, as she very charmingly said, she wanted me to have as many saints as possible on my *porte-bonheur*. Whether it was because she thought me peculiarly in need of saintly protection or not I don't know. Anyway, I clicked the medal on to my watch chain and kissed her smooth, thin brown cheek. Peter shook her hand, and her bird-like eyes twinkled with kindly approval as she bade him farewell.

"For you, Monsieur Pierre," said she, "I have relaxed my rules, and even permitted you in to dinner last night. That is because I think you eminently"—she paused—"estimable," she concluded with a beam.

I chuckled inwardly at the thought of Peter being estimable, which is a word one classes with "worthy,"

and applies to people whom one damns by saying that they "mean well." Peter blushed a brickish hue, and I trust his conscience was reminding him of what he had taught the nuns on the preceding night. He had carefully instructed them, over the coffee, in the old Oriental saying about that beverage—that it should be "as sweet as love, as black as sin, and as hot as hell." The only drawback was that the little nuns could not remember it aright, and invariably brought it out: "As sweet as sin and as hot as love—" which was rather unfortunate.

It was a heaven-sent morning, and we swung joyfully along the precipitous road that descended to the coast, our luggage having gone on ahead in the fusty old black pumpkin of a diligence. We waved good-bye to the various sky lines we knew and loved the best, as different points in the road revealed them, and that night, after a day spent in the blue-and-gold glitter of the Riviera, we took train to Marseilles. The next day we went on to Aigues Mortes, and from there started our pilgrimage on foot which was to lead, by way of Arles and out of the way by Les Baux, to Avignon. We dawdled in this way, painting and writing as we went, through the most lovable country in the world, growing, I think, to know a little of its soul, which its lover Mistral hymns as:—

"Amo de-longo renadivo
Amo jouiouso e fièro e vivo——"

Soul eternally renewed, soul joyous and proud and vital. . . . Proud and vital always, joyous only here and there; but the bleakness, amounting even to dourness, of some of Provence is not the least of its incomparable charms. From the salt marshes of wind-bitten Aigues Mortes,

whose brown, stark battlements rear against the sky, we went along the miles of sand and marsh, past bitter lagoons hemmed in by bars of silted earth and stones, past the swamps where the fever wind blows and little rivulets of brackish water meander, and the film of salt crystals glitters in the sunshine; then, striking more inland, to the desert of the Camargue, across the monotonous miles of which we rode on fierce little horses hired from a half-savage herdsman. And always the terrible mistral blew, till we felt we were becoming as bent and twisted with its breath as the bushes that strained perpetually towards the sea.

Thus we came to Arles, that town of shadowed ways and fragments of carving that make one catch one's breath, and where the women, with their straight, Greek faces, and brows bound by a "*ruban-diadème*," seem sculpture come to life. And from there to one of the most longed-for bournes of our pilgrimage—Les Baux, sacred to *le bon roi* René and *la reine* Jeanne, to many courts of love, to princesses who boasted names such as Blanco-Flour and Sibilo, Ugueto and Bausseto, and who, so sings the poet, "gave love" from their "throne of golden rocks." Les Baux crests a jagged head of the Alpilles, and before we reached the outermost of the tortuous ravines which intersect it, we wandered along straight, white roads, across miles of bleached pasture, ardent with belts of orange-red pollard-willows, or sombre with rows of dark and stately cypress, whose close-set foliage was singed rust-colour on the windward side. The poplars, which only a short while ago had seemed like ghostly skeletons of flames, were breaking into a mist of pale and tender green, the cherry and almond trees had caught little glowing clouds among their

branches, the broom gleamed pure gold among grey limestone or ruddy sandstone rocks, and the sweet smell of thyme and rosemary held the air. Sometimes, we climbed up great scarped bluffs of the pale limestone, and found high-set little towns that seemed hacked from the living rock, half-deserted little towns, where the mistral whistled through wonderful old, carved doorways; or we stopped at some isolated farmhouse of the plain, surrounded by budding vineyards that shimmered like a dragon-fly's wing with sulphate of copper. Twice it happened that night and an overpowering degree of delicious weariness came on us, far from a roof-tree and fireside, and we defied the supposed dangers of the night air and slept rolled up in the blanket we carried in our rück-sack, tucked away in some sheltered crevice on a mattress of springy, sweet-scented box. It was good to curve down to sleep, with the dark sky and powdering of stars blotted out, now here, now there, by the darker foliage of a breeze-stirred olive above, I with my hand clasped round Peter's forefinger for company; it was good to wake to a flushed or paling sky, with the smell of crushed herbs in our nostrils and the peace of the out-of-doors in our hearts.

"And now," announced Peter, as we neared the chain of the Alpilles, rising almost sheer from the plain, and showing ragged and gleaming against the sky, "now we approach the first shrine on our pilgrimage."

"Shrine? Pilgrimage?" I questioned.

"We are, though I have not seen fit to enlighten you before, on a devout pilgrimage, a *via amoris,* to the shrines of famous lovers. And Les Baux was the seat of the Court of Love, built by Jeanne de Laval, wife of René. They held poetic assizes, if you please."

"I've read a lot about the troubadours and the courts of love," I replied, "and it seems they were for the propagation of gilded platonics. A poet vowed fealty and devotion to the wife of some great lord, and she, for her part, took him for her knight, placed a ring on his finger, and gave him the sole kiss he was ever to have of her. He sang and sighed for her, and she, poor thing, may have wished him in the place of her husband, who apparently invariably married her for the fiefs she brought him, and spent his time paying the same spiritual devotion to some other dame. It was an unvicious circle, and the highest pitch that gilded platonics have ever been raised to."

"Gilded platonics is just what it was. That's why I'm taking this place first in the pilgrimage," was Peter's cryptic reply.

Les Baux is the most wonderful place in the world. Not the most beautiful, or the most charming, or even the most lovable, but the most wonderful. A sheer five hundred feet it rears above the plain on one side, indistinguishable from the limestone out of which it springs—a place of ruins and silences, of sharp shadows and light sunshine and a wind to rend the heart; and as wonderful as the town itself is the approach thereto.

Up and up Peter and I toiled, up winding after winding of whitest roadway, the gorse blazing on the slopes above and below, the pungent scent of it in the air. And, all among the gorse, the limestone crags, fashioned to a thousand distorted likenesses by wind and rain, crowded and reared. Defile after defile opened around us among the tumbled mountains, all shouldering up in bleak pallor through slipped mantles of grey-green turf and greyer scrub of rosemary, and we entered the region

of the quarries, where the few inhabitants of Les Baux work for their bread. How Peter and I ever dragged ourselves away from those quarries, even to go on up to Les Baux, I can't tell. They were like ruined cities of the dead; great blocks of gleaming whiteness lay like fallen walls of houses, or stood up in solitary pillars; while, here cut into the cliff-side, there leading to shadowy colonnades, were tall doorways with straight sides and the limestone left in a square, solid lintel. It was, above all, those doorways which gave the place its strange look of Egypt, as of the shattered city of some long-forgotten Pharaoh. Dead, white, still, and yet terrifyingly massive, these seeming ruins stretched all around us, away from the shelving sides of the road, up the mountains, into the shadowy ravines, without a tree to soften their austerity.

So, at last, to Les Baux itself; and if the quarries, being excavated rock, are like a ruined city, Les Baux, which actually is one, looks as though it had been quarried out of the living stone. An inhuman place, yet thronged thick with human memories and rich with carved relics of the races who have held it, from the Roman, Caius Marius, to the great seigneurs who felt and wrought all things passionately—love, religion and poesy; and to the royal House of Anjou, of whom was René, who helped to make it famous. It was left to a Prince of the Church, and, centuries later, to an earthquake, to shatter the carven houses and splendid towers of Les Baux into the ruins that they are.

A boy leapt forward at us as we passed in through the shadow of the ancient gateway—a boy as wonderful as the town. He was a brown, voluble, clear-eyed creature, with thick white teeth, his sunburnt skin powdered

ever so finely with limestone dust, even to the rounded pinky-brown toe that poked through his broken boot. All his clothes, his felt hat, which might have adorned a Hermes, his corduroy jacket and trousers and those tattered boots, were of the same pale harmonious brown as his face, and equally powdered with the fine white deposit. In the course of his confidences he informed us that though only twelve he already worked in the quarries and that he was the best guide in Les Baux. That I can well believe, for his language poured from him in a torrent of description, facts, and ideas of his own, all fiercely intelligent and mostly true. He whirled us into roofless rooms where stately chimneys still arched, rich with carving, from wide hearths where the nettles flickered in the sun; he ran us into inhabited houses where broad-faced, blue-eyed women picked their babies from beneath our feet and pointed us out frescoes in corners too dark to see them; he led us scrambling over crag and broken wall, declaiming from the windiest and most precipitous spots he could find on the beauty of the view or the antiquity of the Roman remains; he showed us mere caverns in the rock where peasants were actually living. Finally, he pulled a bice-green handbill from his pocket and thrust it under our noses. It proved to be an advertisement for a music-hall performance to be held in some slightly more accessible township a few miles off, and it held forth particularly on the charms of a "strong man" who lifted a grand piano with his teeth or his toes, or some such unlikely portion of his person. Hermes held no brief for this affair; he did not even expect us to attend it, and he was not attending it himself. But years ago (when he was a small boy) he had seen this very man, grand piano and all, and he

assured us it was a most marvellous sight. Never in all his life had he seen anything to equal it, and therefore, as visitors in search of the marvellous, it had evidently occurred to him we must be thrilled to hear of this epoch-making event. It was pure altruism on his part, but he did not rise to the height of presenting us with the bice handbill—he continued to bear it along with him, unable every now and then to resist pulling it out of his pocket and following a brown forefinger along its lines of enthralling print.

We contrived at length to get rid of him by promising to turn up for a glass of wine at the inn, and then Peter and I crossed a turfy eminence that shouldered itself up among the rocks and ruins, meaning to gaze upon the view from the edge of it. Up till then we had imagined we knew what wind was; we thought we had been almost one with it as we traversed the Camargue; now we knew we had never really felt it before. We clung for our lives to a broken wall, our hats firmly clasped to our chests, and just managed, between our struggles, to catch a glimpse of the Provence that lay hundreds of feet below and stretched away to the rim of the world. To our right we could see, faint and afar, the towers of Aigues Mortes and a glimmer of sea; southward the forking of the Rhone; eastward range upon range of mountains and the gleam caught by the broad waters of the Durance. And all these wonders, and the miles of plain that here and there were pearled by lagoons and canals, or patched with orchards and vineyards, all these were drenched in sun beneath an arching sky of deep blue that quivered to pallor at the horizon, with only here and there a cloud to vary by

gracious shadow the patterning of the light-coloured world below.

"I begin to see," gasped Peter, "the truth as well as the poetic beauty of what it means in 'Calendal' when it says that the lords of Les Baux had the wind of the Rhone blowing in their veins. The only marvel is they weren't blown away, veins and all."

"Sketching is out of the question, anyway," said I as we beat our way back towards the narrow, steep little street that led to the inn; "I shall have to be immoral and 'sheek' from postcards."

Hermes was awaiting us by one of the little round iron tables painted a faded green that were set about outside the inn. He sprang forward at our approach.

"I have ordered your wine," declared this youth (surely born to carry all before him), "and everything has happened of the most fortunate, for here is my uncle, Monsieur Pouletin. Think of that!"

We thought of it, as we returned, in blank bewilderment, the bow of a portly gentleman seated at one of the little tables, but thinking told us nothing. M. Pouletin himself came to our aid.

"You must excuse my so youthful nephew," said he, "for having the idea that the whole world knows the name of Télémaque Charlemagne Pouletin." (His own expression and manner rather suggested that he could not help agreeing with his nephew.) "The fact is, to those good people of Les Baux a little success, and, shall we say, celebrity, goes a long way. I am *the* Pouletin, the film-maker, Monsieur et Madame, and at your service."

We had neither of us ever heard of him, but we

summoned up intelligent smiles—at least I did. Peter, I saw to my horror, had taken a dislike to M. Pouletin for being there at all. Peter, when he took a dislike to anyone or anything, was about as easy to manage as a ship with a broken rudder in a gale, and nervously I expressed the hope that M. Pouletin would do us the honour of sharing our bottle of wine.

Monsieur Télémaque, etc., was a round, highly-glossy looking little man with downy black hair cut *à la brosse,* and the inevitable velvet collar to his brown greatcoat. The ends of his black moustache were fiercely waxed, and when he grew excited, which he frequently did, they twitched like eager little wings. Of all men the mildest at heart, he was the most easily roused (and calmed again) that I have ever met. He had no idea of keeping anything to himself, and we soon knew that he was travelling for Roget Frères, the big firm of film-makers, in search of fresh inspiration, and had called in at Les Baux to see his old parents. "And you, my children?" he finished, with a paternal beam.

"We are, so to speak," said Peter, "on a sacred pilgrimage."

"Ah, tiens? A honeymoon?" said he, with a still wider beam.

"Our relations are strictly those of business," I replied severely. "Monsieur here has been commissioned to write a book on Provence, and I am illustrating it. At the present moment we are treading in the footsteps —at least we shall when we leave here—of Aucassin and Nicolete."

"Dame! And who may they be? Friends of yours?" asked Monsieur Pouletin.

Peter, aghast at such a state of ignorance, collected

his French together and fixing the unfortunate Télémaque—by now conscious of having said something wrong—with a relentless gaze, he proceeded to pour the following remarks out, gathering in volume as he went.

"Yes, they are friends of ours, and they should be friends of yours, too. It is your own fault if they are not. They are friends, because everything that is externally young and lovely is friendly, and they are the immortal lovers of the world. You will say that they have never lived, except in a manuscript——" M. Pouletin had said nothing at all, and was gazing at Peter with his moist, red lips apart, and an expression like a hypnotised rabbit—"but I reply that that is the fullest and most enviable form of life. The fullest, because it has never known death, the most enviable, because it has never been alive."

"Sapristi!" said Monsieur Télémaque Charlemagne Pouletin.

"You meet them, first, in that wonderful old manuscript of the thirteenth century," pursued Peter, "which sings of them in the Langue d'Oil. Not in the Langue d'Oc, you observe, though that was the language of Provence. And that is why we imagine the singer to be of the North, although he laid his scene in Beaucaire. He says that Aucassin was the only son of the Count of Beaucaire, which was a great castle by the sea.

"But Beaucaire is not by the sea," objected Télémaque, grasping at something which he felt he knew.

"In the first place," said Peter, "Beaucaire is by the sea, because it is vital for the story that it should be so, and what is vital, is. In the second place, it *was* by the sea in the beginning of time, because all about it you can find sea fossils and shells, which is proof, even

to a materialist. It is true that Aucassin and Nicolete were of the divine Middle Ages, and not of the stone or iron age, but if Beaucaire, being actually and physically by the sea once upon a time, and morally and mentally and poetically by the sea in the thirteenth century, does not make it quite enough by-the-sea for the purposes of the story, then what does?"

"Mon Dieu," murmured Télémaque, wiping his brow, and gazing with deep respect at Peter. "Perhaps," he added, hastily, "you have it with you and could lend it me, this so interesting history?" He evidently thought to forestall further tirades. I explained that our copy was in the ancient Langue d'Oil, but, as M. Pouletin merely replied, "Let me see," Peter fished "Aucassin and Nicolete" out of his knapsack, and handed it across the little table. Télémaque opened it cheerily, looked puzzled, turned a few pages back and forth, and finally, with a "Sacré tonnère!" handed it back. For the opening sentences,

> "Qui vauroit bons vers oir
> del deport, du duel caitif
> de deus biax enfans petis . . ."

are as about as intelligible as anything you are likely to come across later on. Peter was by now so proficient in this little dead language that he wrote me a post-card when I was at the convent, which I don't doubt all the other boarders read without being in the least aware of what any of it meant, let alone the beginning thereof: "Mescinete o cler vis." Which is, being interpreted, "Maiden of the shining face."

"It's a simple tale, monsieur," said I, hastily, seeing

a cloud gathering on Télémaque's ingenuous brow, "and the value doesn't lie so much in the actual story as in the characterisation and setting——"

"Thereby resembling all good literature," broke in Peter, mounting one of his pet hobby-horses.

"And," I continued, quickly, "we are going to see the actual scenes of the romance, so as to reconstruct it for ourselves; that is our idea."

A sudden gleam came into the little pursed-up eyes of M. Pouletin.

"We will go together," he declared, "and you shall tell it me as we go."

I was conscious of a pang of dismay. For it had not been jest when we had said we were on a sacred pilgrimage—what of our pursuit of old-time lovers, who would surely fade away like morning mists before the uncompromising sun of M. Télémaque Charlemagne Pouletin?

But if there is one thing more than another over which Peter and I are rank cowards, hurting anyone's feelings is that thing, and somehow we found ourselves hustled into the tonneau of a battered old pea-green motor, while the proud owner thereof, having caught his aged parents, the patron and patronne of the inn, to his manly bosom, himself squeezed behind the wheel. Hermes stood, all smiles, grasping our two-franc piece in one hand and his felt hat in the other, the parents thrust a bunch of apple blossom into my lap, the horn blared "toot-toot," and with Télémaque bent like a vast brown toad over the wheel, his broad red neck bulging level with cap and coat collar, we started off at a rush down the mountain road.

The Milky Way

"I have a ghastly idea that this profane fellow may wish to 'film' 'Aucassin and Nicolete,'" shrieked Peter in my ear, as we fled along in the wind.

I began to laugh, helplessly. The prospect struck me as not being without its humour.

"If you wanted a beautiful poetical Via Amoris," I yelled back at him, "uninterrupted by the banal and the ridiculous, you should have set out on it with someone else. This sort of thing always happens to me."

"It's because of you I'm so sick," explained Peter, as we slid round a more sheltered curve. "To tell you the truth, I had meant to teach you such a lot on this pilgrimage! You'd have gone up another of those steps of yours—in your feelings for me, I mean—at every point. And I'm damned if you can go up steps of that kind while Télémaque Charlemagne Pouletin sets the scene."

And I gaily agreed with him, which only showed how little either of us knew what incongruous forms the gods are sometimes pleased to assume.

CHAPTER XXXIV

VIA AMORIS

(2) *Aucassin and Nicolete*

WE rushed across the level country at about fifty miles an hour, past cliff-high rows of black cypress and gentler bending poplars; scattering at one place a regiment of beautiful pale blue cavalry on manœuvres. There was no wind screen to the car, which perhaps was wise, as it would probably have come to grief, and by the time M. Télémaque rushed us across that great suspension bridge from Tarascon to Beaucaire on which Tartarin so feared to set foot, my hair was in a warm web right over my face. Through it I caught sight, on either hand, of the brown Rhone, refracting blue here and there, like a starling's back; of its golden shoals and of the battlements of Beaucaire rising clear and bright into the late afternoon sunshine on the further side.

We abandoned the car in a little alley and wandered about the town for a while, through those narrow ways across which the tall old houses with their barred and mullioned windows lean as though to stare into each other's eyes; under deep eaves of sculptured wood, where carven hands came out from under the roofs as though for their support; then we turned into the castle grounds and went up the steep slope of them, through the chequered shade thrown by the pine trees upon the long

lush-growing grass. The castle is mostly in ruins save for a tower or so, the splendid sweep of the encircling walls and the great gateway; and the place is allowed to run mercifully wild, not tortured into gravel paths, carpet beds, and lawns which one may not press with an enquiring foot. A seat is placed unobtrusively here and there; and, in great archways that are hollowed out of the walls, and must, I suppose, have once been alcoves in the castle rooms, chairs are placed, and here come the old women of Beaucaire to sit with their knitting in the sun, sheltered from the piercing breath of the mistral. The buff-grey of the sunlit stonework behind them, with just the blue crescent of shadow curved over them by the cutting-in of the arch, makes a brilliant decoration of the old black-clad, white capped figures crouched chattering together; and I felt my fingers itching for a brush.

We stood looking out awhile over the faded brown fluted roofs of Beaucaire—a whole sea of them, stretching and sloping away into a bright mistiness; then wandered to the other side of the battlements and looked over the long curves of the Rhone and its pale sandbanks, away beyond Tarascon to the bleached plains and hillocks of the open country. Then Télémaque said, "To business," which I could see struck Peter as a Goth-like way of putting it.

We all sat down in the grass under a friendly pine, and I began the story of Aucassin and Nicolete. I told it as plainly and baldly as possible because it is profanation to try and tell in your own way what has been told perfectly once and for all, and whether Télémaque ever caught anything of the undying romance of Aucassin's pursuit of Nicolete I don't know. When I had finished with the lovers having "such joy as never yet," he said

something to the effect that "He knew what it was to get an idea into his head so that it wouldn't come out, that one!" thus referring to Aucassin who was so "shapely of body . . . and so full of all gracious qualities;" Aucassin, the king of lovers, with his "high and comely nose," his "eyes grey and dancing," his "hair curled in little gold rings about his clear face." But even M. Pouletin gathered, I think, something of the mysterious quality of Nicolete that Walter Pater felt when he called her a "beautiful, weird, foreign girl." He sat rubbing his downy black head for a moment till it was more *à la brosse* than ever, and then delivered himself to the following astonishing effect: "It is the finger of Providence. Romance—costume—incident—all are there. It can be done, and I, Télémaque Charlemagne Pouletin, am the man to do it!"

"Do what?" chorussed Peter and I together.

"Film it," was the brief and terrible response of Télémaque, the response we had so dreaded.

Well, there it was, and we soon discovered it was no use fighting it. M. Pouletin merely replied to all our cries of "Sacrilege!" with: "If you help me you will get well paid, and you will be able to see the thing is done after your ideas. If you don't, then I shall do it without you, and you will see then that the sacrilege will be far worse." And, haunted by terrible visions of Nicolete dressed in a Louis XIV. lace collar, or Aucassin with a moustache, we yielded.

We all went back over the bridge to Tarascon and engaged rooms at an inn, and then I went to the Poste Restante, where I found two letters awaiting me, one bearing English stamps, and I opened that first, all agog for news of Littlejohn and the Changeling. It proved

to be nothing of an exciting nature as regarded them, but for herself Gladeyes wrote that she was "walking out" with a gentleman from "the Bush," by which she did not mean the wilds of Australia but that district of London known as Shepherd's Bush. I breathed a sigh of relief at the thought of settling Gladeyes in life, and opened the other letter. This was a rather plaintive epistle from Chloe, from which one gathered that life was singularly black for her, but that Jo's wedding, which she had attended some weeks previously as best girl, had been "peerless." Chas and Jo were now wrapt in oblivion somewhere, but Chloe was back in Paris alone, stodgily finishing her time at Collarossi's. Hence these tears. I should have been worried, only I knew that probably by now Chloe was neck-deep in some new "affair" which she would gleefully describe to the whole world as "really platonic *this* time," only to dissolve a few weeks hence in floods of tears with the wail: "How *was* I to know he was feeling things the whole time? I thought it was just friendship, and now it's all spoilt!" And the curious part of it would be that she would undoubtedly believe that she believed herself.

Late that night, after I was abed but while Peter and M. Pouletin were still arguing in the common room below me, I had an idea. Jumping out of bed, I hit on the floor with the heel of my slipper and then stuck my head out of the window. I have always hoped I did not look as absurd from below as Peter and Télémaque did from above, when they thrust their heads forth and turned themselves upside down to ask what I wanted.

"I've had an idea," I shrilled. "You were saying, M. Pouletin, you did not know anyone of a suitable type to play Nicolete. But I do—Chloe, Peter, Chloe!"

"Of course! Absolutely it!" cried Peter. "Have you a photo you could chuck down for M. Pouletin to see?"

I had a few snapshots of Chloe in a light frock being blown about by the wind, and they gave some little idea of her slim grace, the glitter of her hair and the angelic look of her whole person. These I showered down on the upturned faces and then retired to bed and to sleep.

The next morning we wired to Chloe, and the day after that she arrived, and not she alone, but Jo and Chas with her.

"Explain this," cried I, falling into Jo's arms at the station. "I thought you and Chas were the world forgetting, though not by the world forgot."

"So we have been, for the last month, but I suppose it's no good expecting you or Peter to take count of the flight of time."

"It is one of my theories," said Peter, "that time is all of one continuous piece, so to speak, and that we make a mistake even in portioning it off in past, present and future. How much more of a mistake, then, to cut it into absurd squares, like a child's puzzle, and label them January or February, or Monday or Tuesday."

"A little while ago," I added, "we had to write to our publisher. We were at some farm in the middle of a plain. And we didn't know the date, but we knew the month, and the farm people knew the day of the week. And they produced one of those little calendars which have the date that each day of the week falls on, all printed in a column below the initial of the day. Well, we all came to the conclusion it was Wednesday, but whether the 7th, 14th, the 21st or the 28th, no one

could tell, and there was no way of finding out. So we put them all at the head of our letter, and let Mr. Brennan take his chance."

"And then," finished Peter, "the beastly calendar turned out to be of the wrong year, so none of the dates was right, after all."

Jo was looking her best in a leaf-brown satin coat and skirt that just matched her eyes and hair, and Chas was at his man-of-the-worldliest, which made us very proud. Télémaque Charlemagne was visibly impressed. It is needless to say that he had no sooner set eyes on Chloe than he fell into raptures, as great, though not as poetical, as were Aucassin's over his lady of the shining face.

Jo, he declared, he could "fit in" as a court lady, though he added—and it was a perpetual joke against the long-suffering Jo—"If you would only consent to wear the suitable costume, Madame, what a man-at-arms you would make!" Télémaque suggested that as his wife refused, Chas should fulfil that role, but Chas, who is nothing if not a looker-on at life, declined firmly. Of course by now the all-conquering Télémaque had discovered that Peter and I had each been a "pro" in our day, and no amount of honest avowal as to the fifth-rateness of the company in which we had played, sufficed to check his enthusiasm. Peter, he vowed, must be his Aucassin, since he was young, slim, and fair. I could not help thinking Peter's face had too Puck-like a twist to it to be quite suitable, but here, again, Télémaque proved right—the addition of a wig of golden hair, which fell in a shining curve to his shoulders, transformed my whimsical, long-faced companion to a young mediæval knight. As for me, I was a little foot-page, an eminently

fitting choice, since my face is nothing in particular, and my legs really superior. M. Pouletin was one of those producers who, instead of keeping a stock company always in readiness, worked with a nucleus of half-a-dozen character artistes, and augmented them by special "leads," as required, and also by the supers necessary for crowd-work. This nucleus company now arrived from Paris, the supers sprang up, apparently, out of the earth, at a wave of Télémaque's wand; medieval dresses arrived by the crateful from a Parisian expert in such matters, and the rehearsals began.

The chief difficulty turned out to be the setting of the scenes, for Beaucaire castle is undeniably in a ruined condition, and no sea laps its foot. The latter defect worried M. Pouletin not at all. "The river will do as well," said he, placidly. "Why should not the ships sail up from the sea?" As to the shattered state of the castle and of the walls of the town, here, too, M. Pouletin had his remedies, and incredible enough the last one was. To begin with, as he pointed out, very little space was necessary for a cinema scene. The focus of the lens was not wide; and for the figures to be of a reasonably interesting size on the screen, the space they moved in had to be confined. With one tower and a corner of the ramparts we could do wonders, so vowed Télémaque, and there was a complete gateway, which could be besieged. As to the interior, that truly was a more complicated matter, and even were the castle still roofed and roomed, it would not have helped us, as much light was necessary. Here, where most people would have been daunted, M. Pouletin had another idea. There was a cinema studio at Lyons, and to Lyons we would all take train accordingly, to film the indoor scenes, as soon as ever M. Poule-

tin had completed his arrangements for hiring the studio. There only remained to get on the right side of the authorities at Beaucaire, and we all doubted if this were possible, even to the winning tongue of Télémaque Charlemagne. Our hopes—for by now, this organised and systematic desecration had reduced Peter almost to a state of coma—were dashed to the earth, however. Télémaque, his rosy face creased in smiles, burst into the common-room of the inn, where we were all having lunch, and, over a glass of absinthe, detailed to us his success.

"Figure to yourself," cried he, "that the mayor ended by falling on my neck and calling me 'brother'!"

We expressed a perhaps not wholly complimentary surprise, and asked how this miracle had been accomplished.

"Imagine, my children," said Télémaque, "that the mayor is none other than Henri Dupont, who used to be a boy at school with me. Later on we both entered the service of an hotel at Avignon as waiters. I left it for the cinema business; he prospered till he came to Beaucaire, and set up an hotel for himself. He did well, chiefly out of the Americans, and now he is mayor."

"Then you were great friends in the old days?" I asked.

"Que non, que non, m'amzelle! Au contraire, par bleu! When we last parted we had to be rent asunder, not because we were embracing, but because we wished each to tear out the hair and eyes of the other."

"But then, why——?"

"Attendez. The whole trouble was we both loved the same woman—Jeanne, a femme-de-chambre at the Avignon hotel. And I won her."

"But then, how——?"

"I do not wish to speak unkindly of the dead, and I trust she rests in peace," said Télémaque, piously; "it was more than she ever let me do in life. It was notorious the way she treated men! Everyone heard of it! Her tongue! And her finger-nails! Nom d'un nom! Never was husband so abused as I! Ah, well, a beautiful bronchitis removed her a year ago. So now you see how it was that Henri was so pleased to see me. I began by saying there was something I wished to ask him, and he seized me by the hand, crying: 'Ask what you will of me. I owe you eternal gratitude! From what did you not save me!' 'Oh, yes,' I sighed, 'and at what a cost to myself!' After that, all was easy, and I have gained incredible concessions. I have leave to reconstruct. temporarily, part of the castle, to place towers and windows where I will! All in pasteboard, a castle of the theatre, you understand. It will be magnificent, and banners shall wave from the roof!"

"This is hell," groaned Peter, and departed out of doors forthwith, a half-nibbled radish still in his hand.

"Tiens! He has the stomach-ache, that one," observed M. Pouletin. "Well, my children, is it not news of the most magnificent I bring you?"

He beamed at us in such joy that we had not the heart to disappoint him, and we faithlessly applauded; glad in our cowardly way that Peter was not there to hear us.

And, to confess the truth, I was as sad as Peter. Sadder, for mine was not a noble and æsthetic misery—quite the reverse. I had been happy enough as we all walked from the station to the inn together, I was still happy, though with vague prickings of some other feelings, at

the rather uproarious little dinner which followed, but that night, when I had gone to bed, the fell thing came over me, wave upon wave. I wished we had never met Télémaque, who had turned our "devout pilgrimage" into opéra-bouffe—but that I could forgive myself for wishing. What filled me with shame was that I found I was regretting the advent of Jo, of Charles and of Chloe, for there was no denying that it had broken up the solitude *à deux* to which I had been accustomed for so many weeks. The whole atmosphere had suffered sudden and violent disruption, and I felt forlorn and lonely amid the ruins; lonely, because Peter was, sustainedly, in one of his gloomiest moods when he not only gave no help to anyone but when he himself was very difficult to help. And instead of trying, I sulked inwardly, and was irritable outwardly. We made several excursions by train to places we had to see, but the joy had somehow gone out of it all, and the curious thing was that as Peter at last began to grow more cheerful, I became crosser. Chloe, frankly, soon lost patience with me, Jo bore it angelically, but at last even she raised her brows and exchanged glances with Chloe, and I rushed out and stared into the callous Rhone, and felt that I hated the whole world and that nobody loved me. I was, indeed, a worse-than-hog. But ashamed as I felt then, it was as nothing to my shame when I discovered what was at the root of my misery.

The dress rehearsal had just taken place. Incredible as it may sound, the ancient castle of Beaucaire had been duly profaned with pasteboard, and looked like the Earl's Court Exhibition. We had performed in circumscribed areas, marked off just outside the angle of the lens' vision with pegged-down tape, to keep us in focus.

The whole thing, on looking back, seems like a comic nightmare.

All was over, and I, who had not been on in the last scenes, was once more in everyday attire. I had loitered back over the suspension bridge from Tarascon, changing at the inn, because I hoped not to see any more of the performance, and as I reached the castle, I met the supers jostling down through the gateway, making brilliant splashes of vermilion and emerald, blue and purple, in the sunshine. I went on up into the grounds, and there I saw Peter and Chloe, still hand-in-hand, coming down the slope. He had discarded his wig and was grinning broadly, but still playing at being a medieval lord to his stately dame. I stood by a juniper bush, and at last I knew what was the matter with me. Jealousy—plain jealousy, hot waves of it. Oh, why, why hadn't I golden hair and chiselled features and a "presence"? If I had, then I could have played the Nicolete to Peter's Aucassin, I, who was his Nicolete in real life. Here, a worse pang than any shot through my mind. Was I his Nicolete? I, with my mouse-coloured hair, my pale, little face, my lack of all the pretty ways in which Chloe was so versed? After all, it had taken me a long time to realise that my affection for Peter was as strong as it was—had it taken too long and tired him out? Chloe, of course, had been flirting with him, because she flirted as she breathed, but I knew she meant nothing—and, indeed, was genuinely unaware that she did it at all—but would Peter take it as lightly? He might think she really was in earnest, and I could not imagine the man able to resist Chloe if she set her heart on him. Indeed, I don't think I should have much opinion of a man who could.

That terrible moment achieved some good, at least, for

the revelation of it killed my bad temper there and then. There was no place for irritation in the feeling that stormed over me till I was almost drowning in it. And Peter's happiness—that stood out as the first thing of importance. I stepped towards them, with a firm, if somewhat forced smile upon my countenance. The others, hot and exhausted-looking, now appeared, and we streamed down through the chequered shade of the pines, and so out to Tarascon, followed by an excited populace. M. Télémaque Charlemagne Pouletin, who like myself was in ordinary garb, fell in by my side. He was bubbling with relief and glorification, and I, reflecting that it was not his fault, he being but a tool of fate, let him prattle, and gave him due praise.

It only remained that he should add to my discomfort, and he did so between the two banks of the Rhone. It appeared that I, though, as he candidly remarked, not beautiful, had a *petit minois chiffoné,* which charmed all who had the felicity of beholding it, that my prowess in the French language made me an intelligent companion, and that never had he met one of my sex with so many good ideas. Did I not think it would be an excellent thing if I combined these advantages with those which he, Télémaque, as a man, and perhaps something of a genius, possessed?

At first I did not understand, and stared blankly at him. Then, as he elaborated further, I felt that it was indeed the crowning touch to the whole opéra-bouffe, this suggestion that the fat, rosy, downy-headed producer of picture-plays should produce me as Madame Pouletin. I enlarged on my total lack of *dot,* assured him he had over-rated my capabilities, and by the time we had reached the inn, had succeeded in making him understand

the impossibility of acceding to his request. Poor dear, fat Télémaque—I have no doubt he soon consoled himself with fresh triumphs and, I hope, a new Madame Pouletin, but there were actual tears in his kindly little pig's eyes as I left him to fly up to the solitude of my own room. It had been the last nightmare, that walk over the hot suspension bridge, and this was what our "Via Amoris" had come to! Via Amoris, indeed!

CHAPTER XXXV

VIA AMORIS

(3) *Petrarch and Laura*

THAT night I couldn't sleep, and at six o'clock I was downstairs and sitting outside under the plane-trees, which looked exquisitely cool and green to my tired eyes. The kindly patronne brought me some coffee, and as I was sipping it, Peter came strolling out, and sat down at my table. I said "Hullo," and propelled the coffee-pot towards him.

"I am an early bird," he remarked, in a best bromide company voice, "and I see you are the same."

"No, I'm the worm. I didn't sleep. It's got so hot suddenly. I am going to get away from here."

"Ah, well," said Peter, "it's a long worm that has no turning, as the proverb says. I, too, think it is time we left. That's why I scraped myself out of bed so early. To make arrangements. If you hadn't been down, I was going to awake you by playing the 'Humoreske' under your window."

At the mention of the "Humoreske" and the memories it conjured up, I bent my head swiftly, so that a fat and idiotic tear should fall, unperceived, into my coffee.

"Viv," said Peter, "when you have breakfasted—I have ordered you an egg, by the way—go upstairs, put on your bonnet—yes, it is not masculine ignorance, I mean your motor bonnet, cast your belongings together,

to be sent on by the Petite Vitesse, and be ready here in half-an-hour."

I sat with my mouth open and the tears suspended in my eyes.

"Ready for what?" I asked.

"When *I* was a little girl," replied Peter severely, "I was taught the following rhyme:

"Speak when you're spoken to,
Do as you're bid,
Shut the door after you,
And you'll never be chid."

That's all I have to say on the subject at present. This correspondence must now cease."

"May I say anything to the others?" I asked, meekly.

"If you like, you may leave a note on your pin-cushion, in orthodox style."

"But I must have something to say in it," I objected.

"Say that we have gone on."

"Gone on?" said I, densely, "but why?"

"Petrarch and his Laura, stoopid. Viv——" here his hand came over the table and caught mine—"have you forgotten? That we're on a Via Amoris? That you've still got something to learn, and that I, with the help of Petrarch and Laura, am going to teach it you?"

"No—I hadn't forgotten—but, oh, Peter, I thought you had!"

I did not leave a note on my pin-cushion, but when all my preparations were complete, crept into Chloe's room. She was still asleep, but I heartlessly awoke her, and managed to instil into her drowsy brain that Peter and I were going on. She put her arms round my neck and murmured that she hoped I would be happy, and would

The Milky Way

I please tell Madame not to send up her breakfast till she rang for it.

"Good-bye, you lazy thing," I said, with all the unbearable virtue of the early-riser. "Good-bye. And, Chloe—I want to say, and I want you to say it to Jo for me, that I'm sorry I've been such a cross pig lately."

"You haven't, not a bit," declared Chloe, generously, but with a sad lack of truth, and we exchanged an embrace that on my side was not entirely innocent of egg.

The pea-green car, with a chauffeur culled from a neighbouring garage, was waiting outside, and as he tucked me in, Peter informed me that M. Pouletin had lent it, to take us wherever we wanted to go.

"And where do we want to go?" I asked. "Not to Avignon again, surely?"

"No, to Vaucluse, of course."

"I think it's awfully nice of Télémaque," said I.

"Not a bad old chap," agreed Peter.

"A very good chap," I declared, and added, "very."

We talked hardly at all as the car tore along the fresh, morning roads, but I felt the mistrust and soreness of the past week or so being blown away from me, and I saw by the backward tilt of Peter's head and the light in his narrowed eyes that he too was being swept clean of the depression which had lain upon him.

At the village of Vaucluse we dismissed the pea-green car with a message of thanks and farewell to Télémaque, and then set off on foot up the valley.

Vaucluse valley is one of those places which, from the intensity and beauty of the passion associated with it and breathed into its air, seems a more poetic mood, a state of mind, a lovely emanation and memorial of the passionate spirit which sang and loved there, than an

actual place. It is impossible to look at that towering semi-circle of cliff, which makes a great amphitheatre of the valley's end, without imagining how Petrarch's eyes must have gazed upon it, up to the cloud-wrapped, gleaming snow peaks above; and it is impossible to look downwards again to the river that rises in the hollow of the cliffs, without a picture of Laura, as he saw her, bathing her white feet in its waters.

"Read it to me," said Peter, lying in the grass at my feet; "you know, the one about the river."

I opened my tattered little volume of the most divine love-songs ever written, and read him the one, beginning: "Chiare, fresche e dolci acque," the exquisite cadences of which fall with as inevitable a grace as the water that it praises.

"Oh, oh!" said Peter, rubbing his forehead in the grass, "to have written it! Well, it's divine, even to read it. 'Aere sacro, sereno'—isn't that just what one feels here? It's not so much the passion of Petrarch as the cold, clear, unruffled serenity of Laura that lives on here."

"Did she ever love him, I wonder?" I mused. "It seems impossible that any woman could have things like that written to her and remain unmoved. Why, it must have been like being wooed by a god."

"That she remained unwon, we all know. Think of his 'pallor and his pain.' As to being unmoved—I can't think it! Although the whole impression of Laura always is of someone aloof and spiritual. It's no wonder that people accuse him of imposing on the world, for poetic purposes, a Laura who had no real existence."

"Instead of which, there's a biographer who wishes us to believe she was the wife of a man who scolded

her till she cried, and who made her bear ten children."

Peter sat up and ran his fingers through his hair.

"I don't believe that. What does it rest on? A note, which may or may not be genuine, on the margin of a manuscript in the library at Milan! The only thing is, if one gives up belief in that, one has to give up that description of her as 'a lady in a green mantle sprinkled with violets, over which fell the golden plaits of her hair.' I cling rather to that mantle, I must say. But no, she was a simple, wonderfully strong-souled girl, who lived in this valley, and he probably saw her first when she was bathing her white self in the 'dolci acque,' which, after all, is worth all the mantles in the world—as you and I know, Viv. And his priestly orders were quite enough bar, to her way of thinking. One needn't stick in a surly husband and ten squalling brats."

I am, as was very often apparent, no such idealist as Peter, and though I should rather have liked giving Hugh de Sade and his progeny into limbo, I felt myself unable to do so. If Laura were the simple peasant girl, then how came it that Charles of Luxemburg kissed her at a banquet—a chaste salute which caused Petrarch pangs of envy? I intimated as much to Peter, who would have none of it. The poems, in every line of them, he said, breathed of her as an untouched girl, a "Vallis Clausa," like her own Vaucluse.

"All very lovely," said I, "if Laura had died young. But, you remember, Petrarch loved her for one-and-twenty years before, as he says, she 'took his heart with her to heaven.' Laura must have been between forty and fifty when she died. And I think, whether Hugh de Sade scolded her or no, it's better to picture her, when she died of plague, as being a beautiful, stately woman

who'd borne ten children, even to a man she didn't love, than as a woman who'd done nothing but keep Petrarch at bay, in some farm beside the Sorgue."

"Perhaps you're right," said Peter, suddenly. "It spoils the youthful picture, but it beautifies the middle-aged one. And Petrarch had a mistress and two children in Avignon, though that never spoils the story a bit, even if it ought to. In a way, that and Laura's wifehood (if she were a wife; mind, I don't quite give in on the subject) both go to make the idyll more perfect, because it becomes so purely of the spirit. Viv, I wonder why everyone always talks of love as though it were a definite quantity. It comes differently, and means something different to each person on this earth."

"Yes, it does. But in theory I think it's much the same to all of us, before we know anything about it in practice. When one is very young—eighteen or nineteen, the future's all wrapt in a beautiful golden mist, and it's ever so far ahead. One feels quite confident that one day this mist will lift, or rather, become a beautiful golden light, instead of a beautiful golden mist. That was what one meant by 'falling in love.' But it was very remote, as well as very splendid, and meanwhile one was so happy and life was such fun that one didn't want to hurry."

"And then?" asked Peter, adding—"and——now?"

"Well—then—then one got nearer to the golden mist, and it was less misty and less golden, and nothing happened at all, and the future had become the present, and one still went on from day to day. And, speaking personally, this 'one' had to go out and earn its own living."

"Well, that's only 'then.' What about 'now'?" asked Peter.

"Oh, but I haven't finished with 'then' yet. The demi-god whom I fondly pictured as awaiting me in that golden mist was—would you like to hear what he was like? He was about forty, had a square, clean-shaven jaw, hair going iron-grey on the temples, and velvety, grey eyes that, as far as I remember, were to be able to flash like steel if occasion warranted. I suppose men don't look ahead in that way, do they, Peter?"

"Not in that way—not to marriage as the ultimate and most gorgeous firework. Among boys there's an enormous amount of curiosity about women, often not of a very nice description. And if, like me, you didn't care for that kind of speculation and talk—well, then you didn't dwell much on it at all, except that you had an idea it must be rather jolly to be in love. And so it is, too. It's the finest thing in the world. All love is, because love is life. Love of one's parents, friends, brothers, of one's dog, of the sun and wind and stars, and the little things that move on leaves and among the grass; love of life altogether. And that queer, rare, wonderful thing that holds them all, like the atmosphere holds the world—love of God. It's all of a piece. I have a theory—" (and here Peter began to wave his hands, as he always did, when he began on that pet sentence of his)—"I have a theory that love is all in one huge, shining, quivering sheet, like the sea of crystal in the Revelation. And the love that each of us has is derived from it, as the rain is originally drawn up from the sea. There's a power o' water in the world, Viv, what with the sea and rivers and lakes and things, but it's really all one piece, you know, perpetually being condensed and drawn up, and dissolved and forming again, in a vast circle. That's like love."

"Then one needn't mind if one's love seems all different from what one expected, because it still belongs to the big love, even if what one has is only a raindrop or so? The funny thing is, Peter, I always imagined my iron-jawed, grey-velvet-eyed person would love me most enormously, and now if I marry, I'd rather do the loving myself."

"Marriage is different to what one thinks, too," opined Peter. "For instance—well, you must know by now that I want to marry you, Viv. I want to have you there, almost always. And no one but you. I shouldn't want to go away to other women, but I shall want to go away to other things. Work, most of all. You're such fun to play with, I think I should always want you for that! But to work one must always go alone. You're the pluckiest, dearest, sweetest thing that ever happened, and I can't do without you, and I've got to have you, because you're as much a necessity of life as air or food, and just as much of a daily miracle as sunrise. But I've the wander-lust and the lone-lust, and you mustn't forget it, dear."

I sat silent, stroking the rough, fair head in my lap.

"But"—continued Peter after a minute, "there is—to a male creature—something of a feeling of putting his head in a noose when he marries. Less with you than with anyone, which is funny, because one always pictures you as so much more with one than most wives. As a rule, women are creatures to go back to. You're a companion on the way. And there's another funny thing—you used to look forward to marriage as a sort of inevitable splendour, and I never looked forward to it at all, so you want to be married more than I do, and yet I want to marry you a sight more fiercely than you

want to marry me. I don't want marriage, quâ marriage, and don't you believe any man who tells you he does—but I do want to marry you. Most partiklar."

"Well, you shall," said I.

"I fell in love with you at once, you know, Viv. You've only walked in, step by step. By the way"—and here he knelt up beside me and took my hands, "Viv, how much *do* you——?"

"I don't know, Peter dear," I replied, truthfully. "I know that I couldn't marry anyone but you, and I can see now that even if it had gone as far as fitting on my wedding dress, I could never have married Harry or William, or anyone but you. I don't think you're a prodigy of genius and handsomeness, and goodness, though I do like your funny face, and I adore your mind, and I think you're the goodest person I happen to know. But it's the you-ness of you I like best about you."

"Off the point. Get back to how much you love me."

"Oh——!" I said, and held out my arms. He laid his head against my shoulder, and I pressed it there and kissed it. "I don't know," I said again. "I only know I want to hold you tight, tight, and that I want to keep away anything that might hurt you; and give you all you want. I'd fight God for you. I'd stand between Him and you if He wanted to hurt you. I wish I were God to protect you."

We stayed quietly, and only the faint, thin voice of trickling waters made the serene air alive.

"When did you first know? That you felt all that, I mean?" asked Peter, at length.

"Not quite entirely till now. And up to Tarascon I took it, and you, as a matter of course. It was Aucassin

and Nicolete—and Chloe—I feel horrid about it and ashamed——"

Peter burst out laughing.

"Good old Télémaque," he said; "and I vowed he would be death to romance! D'you remember? I said you couldn't go up any more steps while Télémaque was round spoiling things! And to think it was that—darling, what a relief to find you so human!"

"And you," said I, "when did you begin to know?"

"I always knew I wanted you. If you mean when did I know I must have you—well, Viv, could I see your dearness and not want you; could I feel your nearness, and not know I must have you?"

He leant towards me, and I suddenly felt I didn't quite want him to kiss me then. I slipped through his arms and stood up.

"Let's wander a bit," I said.

We wandered till those thin, faint voices began to be overpowered by one more insistent; we turned up a shadowy, narrow twist of gorge, where a sharp frost, such as that land of contrasts knows even in April, glittered in the crevices, and the voice grew stronger. Another curve, and we came on something that made us stop, and stand gazing up.

The cliff curved away from the pass in a dark semicircle that towered far above it, and over the edge of this curve came a slather of water, blue as a kingfisher where the sun shone on it before it fell over into the shadow. It gave a curious effect, that constantly descending slather of water and the sunlit gleam of colour that always stayed in the same place, so that it almost seemed as though the water ran under it. In mid-air, the thin stream changed to a smoking column of spray,

only turning again, as by some alchemy, to water, when it splashed on to the boulders at the cliff's foot. To the right of the fall, a wild cherry-tree, thick with pearly blossom, reared up and out from the side of the rock-wall, out into the sunlight. The spray was being blown by the breeze on to the cherry-tree, and as it drifted it froze.

How long we stood looking at it I don't know, but I know the tears were in my eyes for the sheer, aching beauty of it. Peter spoke first.

"Oh," he said, "dare I make a poem about it? It's so exquisitely virginal, and yet bridal too. Look at her coming out into the sunlight, and that perpetually blowing veil of spray drifting over her and freezing on her filigree of white blossom. Isn't she slender and chill, and yet golden-white in the sun?"

I only said, "It's Laura herself." It was all I could think. If ever a thing expressed personality, this vision-tree expressed that of Petrarch's Laura, the loved and lovely, and aloof; still exquisite and fragrant, guarding her valley of Vaucluse as when Petrarch saw her there; Laura, with her "sudden-shining smile, like angels' mirth."

"And I've been theorising about love!" said Peter. "Love, forgive me!"

And it was then that Peter and I kissed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WORLD OBTRUDES ITSELF

AT last we wandered down the valley again to the little inn, and there ordered a meal to be brought to us in the garden that sloped down to the river. It was then well towards evening, and as we clicked our wine-glasses together, a familiar sound broke in upon us—the unmistakable, blaring "toot-toot" of Télémaque's pea-green car. We looked up, and there, coming towards us, were Jo, Chas and Chloe, the latter waving a *petit-bleu* in her hand.

It is a rather curious thing that I felt only pleasure at sight of them, none of the sense of a disrupted atmosphere which had so fretted me at Beaucaire, and I suppose this was because Peter and I were now in such a definite sphere all of our own, that material interruption left it calm. I ran towards Chloe, crying "What's the news?"

"From Gladeyes," gasped Chloe, thrusting the *petit-bleu* into my hand. "We knew you'd want to know at once, and we asked the chauffeur where he'd driven you, and we followed."

The telegram bore the simple, not to say, laconic statement: "Married Mr Murdock registry this morning sailing Canada at once will not deprive you of Lucy have left food with her and Emily at studio GLADYS MURDOCK."

For a moment I was bereft of speech, almost of thought; then all I could say, very stupidly, was:

"But Gladeyes wrote and said she was 'walking out' with someone in Shepherd's Bush!"

"Perhaps," observed Peter, "she thought a husband in the hand was worth two in the Bush. Heavens above us—Gladeyes and Edgar! What a mixture! They won't either of them speak a grain of truth from the beginning of the day till the end! Such a marriage should have been forbidden by the Eugenic Society!"

"I don't care a straw about that," cried I, awaking to the full import of the news, "but don't you realise that they've been and gone and left Littlejohn and the Changeling, the two poor, helpless innocents, alone at the studio! To say she's 'left food with them!' Tinned sardines and a pressed tongue, I suppose. Oh, what mayn't be happening to them, even now—— I must go back at once."

There was nothing else to be done; everyone saw that. If Jo or Chloe had been in London, so that I could have wired the state of affairs to them, it would have been different; as it was, we all agreed to fly back together. Luckily, Peter and I now had all the material needful for our book, Jo and Chas wished to see about their flat in town, and Chloe's one idea was to get back in time for Varnishing Day at the Academy, for she had that morning received her ticket for it, which told her that the miniature she had sent was "in." I snatched my thoughts from Littlejohn to congratulate her.

"And, oh!" she then shrieked, "I'd quite forgotten there's one for you, too! You never told us you'd sent, Viv. What was it?"

I caught at my envelope with a beating heart, and pulled out the coveted orange ticket. Yes, I, too, was "in," if I didn't find, when Varnishing Day arrived, that I had been "crowded out."

"A water-colour," I answered; "at least as much that as anything. It had pen-and-ink, charcoal, pencil, water-colour and body-colour in it, and was painted chiefly with a rag and a tooth-brush. It was doubtless very handsome, and represented Peter as a herdsman, piping beneath an olive-tree, his sheep browsing around, with their legs all artfully concealed by vegetation. Legs are so difficult."

All this time Chas had been burrowing in the recesses of a Bradshaw, and he announced that we could motor to Avignon, dine there, catch the night express to Paris, where we should arrive early next morning, and be able to take the first boat train to Calais.

"Where's Télémaque?" asked I, as we piled breathlessly into the car, where the luggage of the whole party seemed already taking up all the room there was.

"Gone to Avignon by train. We promised whatever we eventually did to leave the car there for him to-night. Right you are, Chas, press on."

Chas pulled the lever, and away we went, Jo and Chloe among the band-boxes behind, I in the front seat beside Chas, and Peter on the floor at my feet, with half his person disposed upon the step. It is not many miles to Avignon from Vaucluse, and soon we sighted its towers and battlements, reflected in the liquid gold of the evening river, and standing up, a soft purple-blue, into what seemed the no less liquid gold of the sunset sky. The day that had been so magical for Peter and myself was over, and yet it seemed a fitting end that we should enter

the town sacred to Petrarch and his Laura, who had helped to show us on our way so clearly. Also, after the wonder that the day had held for us, it was good to be once more in the midst of friendship and much talk, and dinner that night was a delightful meal. Télémaque was there, at the very hotel where he had wooed and won the late unlamented, induced to go there by a curious mixture of sentimentality and relief. He would not hear of our merely leaving the car and withdrawing; no, he insisted we should all do him the honour of dining with him, and so we did.

I can't remember that Peter or I made any definite announcement of the understanding we had come to; I don't suppose we did, but everyone seemed to realise it, all the same. Perhaps we looked different from our usual selves. Anyway, Chloe kissed us both, and I have to admit that Télémaque did the same. Peter's face, as Télémaque's fierce little black moustachios were pressed into his cheek, was a sight for the gods. Jo caught my hand under the table and whispered:

"Darling, I'm so glad! Of course, we always knew, but I'm so glad it's come. It's the wisest thing in the world, Viv. Only look at Chas and me!"

Télémaque sank into sudden gloom after dinner, and when he saw us off at the station, late that night, he pulled out his handkerchief and wept freely into its folds. Chas watched, with a grin of inhuman glee, as Télémaque held, first Peter and then myself, in his scrubby embrace once more.

"The others, too, M. Pouletin!" I murmured in his ear, "do not let their feelings be hurt, when they have such an affection for you——"

The gallant Télémaque failed not to act on my sugges-

tion. He bowed towards Chloe, and with a "permettez, m'amzelle?" imprinted a chaste salute on her cheek, and then repeated the performance on Jo, who was laughing helplessly. I saw the look of fear spread on Chas' countenance, I saw him leap up the step of the train, and I pulled him firmly down by the coat-tails. I was resolved he should pay for that heartless grin.

"Ah, my brother!" cried Télémaque, clasping the ramrod-like Chas to his breast, "I weep at saying farewell! I have misunderstood you. I see it now. I thought you cold, reserved, English. Now I feel sure your heart is warm, warm. I do not say 'adieu' to you, my children, but 'au revoir.'"

We were cast into the train by a strong-minded porter, and the stout figure of Télémaque stood, looking rather forlorn, upon the dimly-lit platform. Then, as the train started, he puffed beside us for a second or so.

"The film!" he panted, "our great film! Free passes—I will give orders—for you all to have free passes, my children! Au revoir, au revoir!"

I leant out of the train and blew a last kiss to him, and then, sinking back, I began to laugh.

"What's amusing you?" demanded Peter.

"Only that once one begins on the downward path, it is astonishing the rate at which one progresses. A few short months ago I was horrified and miserable because you kissed me, and now I have not only been embraced by a little French cinema-agent, but I have embraced him in my turn! If this is the result of a mere engagement, whatever will be that of matrimony?"

"Kissing," replied Peter, "is an excellent thing—and by the way, Viv, you kiss very badly. You don't kiss, you peck. But that can be remedied. Only you will

ing a little forlorn. S
corner of the carriage,
had not been able to e
all been appropriated e
but Chas had insisted o
and myself. Chloe nov
gested that we should r
to Peter and Chas the t
were in. I slipped my h
ridor, and we followed t
three narrow couches, f
not with sheets, let down
as though by enchantment
out on them in a row.

It was a long time sinc
and I confess that for a
of talk that we ourselves
labelled "gellish." In th
ture was in that golden r
Peter, we had been used t
ing in love"—what we ea
ently we imagined

one's housemaid 'Mary.' Imagine, if the first were Henry and the second Algernon, how annoyed Algernon would be when I called him Henry, from sheer force of habit. And when I had attained William, and called him by either of the names of the first two, how enraging that would be for him! I shall call them all 'John.' One isn't likely to confuse a nice simple name like John."

The only passion Jo had ever felt, besides her devotion for Chas, was for a bandmaster with curly hair, who was to be seen daily on Folkestone pier, at which place, Jo, aged twelve years, was residing at the time. I had never been able to care for anyone in what we always referred to as "that sort of way"—as though it were a special brand, like a patent medicine. Chloe had been deeply in love with a succession of hopeless ineligibles ever since we had known her. Owing to the merciful if somewhat confusing fact that these attacks were each always cured by the next, their results had never been permanently or irretrievably disastrous. Each time, Chloe was sure she "had never known what love was before," and, if there chanced (which was seldom) to be a gap between two attacks, then she vowed that she had never loved at all. There was a gap at present, and just now Chloe was contented that it should be so. Soon, she would begin to feel a curious sense of idleness; then she would be seized with a conviction that nobody loved her, and then—woe betide the luckless youth who next approached her. He would soon be deeply in the toils, only to have his dream of bliss shattered by Chloe finding she had "mistaken her feelings towards him."

"Well," said Chloe, switching out the light, and snuggling down beneath an elegant blue rug that she had especially bought to match her eyes, "well, Viv?"

"Well, what?"

"Well, how does it feel? Now you and Peter——? Different?"

"No, that's the funny part of it. The same, only more so."

"Jo, *you* know all about it, because you're married," continued Chloe. "Does it go on being thrilling, or does it get boring?"

"Oh, it gets thrilling-er and thrilling-er," declared Jo. We all stretched a little, pulled up our rugs and lay in silence, while the train thundered and swayed on through the night.

Then: "Well, I'm glad it's not me, anyway," said Chloe.

I considered this a reflection on Peter, and though I knew (and I was very glad to know) that he wouldn't have suited Chloe in the least, I yet felt not quite pleased.

"My dear Chloe," I replied, "no one ever can understand anyone marrying the people they do. It's a great providential law. It's when that law's upset, that people get into the divorce court!"

"Oh, I didn't mean because of that," said Chloe elliptically, "but because it's still ahead of me. Jo's is over. The first part of yours is over. Mine's still ahead."

"Don't you be too sure, young woman," advised Jo, sleepily; "it may be a case of 'there ain't goin' to be no core' with you! Now let's go to sleep."

But Chloe's words had banished sleep from me. Quite suddenly I felt plunged in an abyss of depression that would have done credit to Peter. I realised that though I'd gained something, I'd lost something, too, something that would never come back. And we had both lost our

The World Obtrudes Itself

Pays du Tendre——. We were out on the better-regulated, more plainly-marked road of another country, and somehow there was not quite the same manner about it. That there were finer, dearer things to be found there I knew, even in that depression, but I knew, too, that never again should we have such a half-shy, half-intimate, elusive, exquisite time as we had had this winter in Provence. For in the Pays du Tendre the whole bubble of the world itself swings by a gold hair, silence and speech alike are full of new and entrancing discoveries, every moment is a step further into the unknown region, and both inhabitants—for there are never more than two in that country—drift along on a tide of golden days, knowing that there are definite actions, sorrows, and perhaps keener joys ahead, but wrapped in a present that for them flows imperceptibly along. In the Pays du Tendre, the lovers are as children; afterwards, they have to take their place among the grown-ups of the world. I buried my face in my pillow, and if I had not suddenly fallen asleep, I am quite sure I should have cried.

But next day, when we were all aboard the steamer, something happened which showed me what it was that made the change well worth it after all, something that made me "go up another step." It was one of those clear April days when the showers fall through the sunlight, and Peter and I were standing by the rail above the foc's'le, looking down on to the hold, whose tarpaulin cover gleamed with the spray that perpetually broke over it, and with every wave a fountain seemed to play in the air above the grimy donkey-engine.

"Isn't it good?" said Peter, sniffing the salt air, and holding my hands strongly against the rail, as the ship reared and plunged again, "isn't it good? There's noth-

heart that not even Li
I knew that I must ha
it above everything in

"Oh—look!" cried

I followed his pointi
of spray that was havi
us, hung a rainbow.
spray fell; then, as the
mimic fountain up, the
With every scatter and r
down like a Jacob's
passionate colour the unr
bound, we watched it g
spray, coming and going,

I have never been so n

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE VIEW FROM THE ATTIC

WE all arrived at St. John's Wood that afternoon, and my heart beat with apprehension as I flew across the courtyard and up the ladder to the studio door. I burst it open and ran in, falling, as I did so, over the Nelephant, who at once gave her well-remembered scream. Another cry followed close upon it—the joyful cry of the Changeling, who was sitting on the floor, helping a struggling pile of kittens to play with an ostrich feather, which, as it afterwards transpired, she had gleaned from Chloe's best summer hat. Beside the Changeling lay Littlejohn, her fat, short legs sticking straight out before her, and a tube of oil-paint dangling from one corner of her mouth. I had not returned from France an instant too soon.

Littlejohn had only just succeeded in making a tiny hole in the tube, and beyond being violently sick with mingled emotion and paint, almost as soon as she saw me, no harm was done. I sat down, also on the floor, and my family came crowding round me—Littlejohn, her upheaval once over, as serene and stolid as of yore, the Changeling somewhat hysterical, and absolutely inarticulate.

Jo at once began to get out the tea things, and discovering no butter or milk (my guess had been only too correct, and a tinned tongue had indeed been left by

Gladeyes as the staple article of diet), sent Chas and Peter out to buy some in Circus Road.

Chloe gazed from the kittens to the Nelephant, and from the Nelephant to the kittens, then finally burst out with:

"Well! D'you mean to tell me that the Nelephant perpetrated those? This is how she behaves directly our back is turned! After always pretending she was above the softer emotions! Nell, come here, and let me ask you what you mean by it."

But the Nelephant, in spite of her lapse, proved unchanged in temper, and at the first caress fled shrieking, and brooded over her family like a thunder-cloud, muttering at intervals, and clapping her children over the head with her club-like paws. I don't often dislike an animal, but I must admit to a coldness for the Nelephant.

When the Changeling had quieted down somewhat, and was contenting herself with merely stroking my skirt in silence, and Littlejohn, all smiles, was showing me how she had progressed to the toddling stage, Chloe, in a fit of domesticity, began to set the studio to rights. It badly needed it, for the Changeling, poor dear, must have been so puzzled at finding herself alone and in a responsible position, that her wits seemed to have gone more astray than usual. Only the washing and dressing of Littlejohn, from long and loving practice, she had accomplished as well as usual, and probably better than Gladeyes, with her bursts of mother-love, was capable of doing.

Chas reappeared with a tin can of milk, and Peter with a pat of butter rolled up in paper, and in rather

a melted condition from his grasp. "Warm from the cow," he said, laying it tenderly on the table. Jo spread it on a large, but very stale loaf, which she proceeded to hack into slices, exclaiming bitterly, "Why the dickens didn't Gladeyes joint the loaf before she went away and left it?"

"Hullo!" cried Chloe, shaking out some draperies that were tumbled on the window-sill, "here's something else she left. It's for you, Viv." And she handed me a rather grubby note, smelling of violets, and addressed in purple ink. I opened it and read (aloud, as notes are read upon the stage, which must have been the theatrical instincts of Gladeyes influencing me through the paper) as follows:

"DEAR MISS LOVEL,—I don't know what you'll say when you get my telegram. But I love Mr. Murdock passionately, and a true woman can but follow her heart. I am following mine to Canada, where, I hope, with my sympathy to cheer him and his six hundred pounds capital, Mr. Murdock will do something really splendid, something that will make us all proud of him. You will always be interested in him, I know, for he tells me you have been his best friend, and helped him to regain his self-respect. I am not jealous of his admiration of you, because I know how different that sort of feeling is from what he feels for me. He says I am his '*load-star*.' I think it such a poetical expression. Dear Miss Lovel, I am not taking Lucy, because I know how you love her, so I leave her to you with a mother's blessing. It almost breaks my heart, but my duty to Edgar comes before everything, does it not? Please re-

member me to Mrs. Chetwynd and Miss Callendar, and Mr. Whymperis, and believe me, always yours gratefully,

"GLADYS MURDOCK."

I read this astonishing epistle through in a voice stony from sheer amazement, and only just stopped myself in time from reading the following postscript aloud also:

"P.S.—I did tell Edgar the truth about Lucy, about my not having been married to her father. And Edgar said there were base men in the world who took advantage of young girls, and that the essential innocence of my soul was untouched, which I thought so beautiful of him. And, since you're taking Lucy, I feel it only right to tell you who her father is. It's Mr. Maurice Purvis, the famous artist. He won't deny it if you ask him.—G.M."

Under cover of the comments aroused by the letter, I managed to conceal the fact that I had stumbled on this even more illuminating postscript, for, after all, Chloe's "affair" with Maurice Purvis was not of such a very ancient date as to preclude all embarrassment on her part at hearing such news. Besides, I didn't see why anyone ever should know that piece of news—I knew enough of Mr. Purvis to be sure he would not want Littlejohn —and I did want her.

"Well, of all the damned cheek!" remarked Chas, "coolly eloping like that, and planting her offspring on you!"

"Alas, poor Edgar!" said Peter, "how bitterly will he rue Gladeyes' 'womanliness' some day! He found a difficulty in running straight himself, but at least he

always knew he was crooked. Whereas Gladeyes could talk a circle into a straight line."

"Chas," said Jo, "I hereby solemnly announce that we—you and I—contribute yearly to the upkeep of Littlejohn and her attendant, Changeling. It's a bit thick to expect Peter and Viv to do it all."

I paid no heed, for on poking into the highly-scented envelope I had found another enclosure, this time written on a piece of drawing paper.

"DEAR MISS LOVEL,"—(ran this communication) "I know you will pardon this unceremonious departure when you think of the excuse I have—*i.e.*, Gladys. I have indeed been blest beyond my deserts—in my mother, in you as my friend, and in my girl. I have paid off all my debts, Miss Viv, and hope to do well in Canada. I daresay I shan't be what you'd call honest, but I won't try any more silly low-down games like the one you caught me at. Who knows? I may become a member of Parliament, if they have such things out there. I trust you will not mind our leaving you baby Lucy, but Gladys thinks it would be so selfish to take it away from you. And now, Miss Viv, I am trying to say what I want, what I am writing this letter to say. I am not entirely ungrateful, even in deed, and I am making you a present, which I hope will be of use to you, as an expression of my gratitude for that time when you spared mother and me. I have made a deed of gift, giving you Secrecy Farm. The land, as you know, is all sold, but there's a bit of garden, and the house is big, though old. I know this is what the old lady would have wished. You were the only person, excepting myself, that she loved, and she was very set on you. Whatever I have

been to the rest of the world, to you I am always very sincerely yours,

"EDGAR MURDOCK."

I heard none of the comments that were shrieked aloud, for I was shrieking myself, dancing round the studio and waving Edgar's letter above my head. A house! A house for Peter and me, and the Changeling and Littlejohn, and for Jo and Chas and Chloe, whenever they cared to come and stay! A roof-tree and fireside of our very own!

We all partook of that unprepossessing tea in a state of jubilation bordering on frenzy and after it, Jo and Chas departed for their new flat at Campden Hill. Chloe was to stay at the Hencoop with me until my marriage, and Peter retired to his ancient Bloomsbury attic, taking one of the Nelephant's kittens as a present to his landlady. A long night's rest was a necessity for all of us, since next day Peter and I had to confront our publisher with the results of our winter's wanderings, and Chloe and I had also to attend the R.A., as proud exhibitors therein, it being Varnishing Day.

As a matter of fact, we all attended it—Jo, Chloe, Chas, Peter and I. We all met in the courtyard, and there laid a deep and cunning plan. Jo marched up the stairs first, waving my ticket casually under the nose of the man at the top, then Chloe followed with her own. Jo then gave Chloe mine again, and Chloe emerging, gave it to Chas, who walked in on the strength of it. This little game was repeated, till we were all within the sacred walls.

Peter and Chas were much intrigued by the unwonted sight of the R.A. swathed in dust sheets and brown hol-

land, pots of varnish and top-hats decking the muffled settees, and famous artists perilously poising on step-ladders while they dabbed at their pictures somewhere round the sky-line. We settled, in case embarrassing questions were asked, that Chas and Peter were to be miniaturists. It was a trifle awkward when a well-known sculptor of Chloe's acquaintance, on being introduced to Peter, asked where his contribution was, for Chloe replied feverishly that it was a miniature in the same breath that Peter, losing his head, said that it was badly skied. However, these nerve-racking little incidents merely served to brace us for our visit to Mr. Brennan. The most important outcome of that visit was that Mr. Brennan advanced us fifty pounds at once, on the strength of Peter's manuscript and my sketches, though neither was quite finished; and Peter then walked out alone with the money, and refused to tell me what he was going to do with it. Next day I knew. He had spent thirty-odd pounds on a special licence, and the rest he proposed to spend on a week's honeymoon. I pointed out that as we were merely going straight into residence at Secrecy Farm, and the honeymoon consisted of being by ourselves for a week, twenty pounds was a rather superfluous sum, so we decided to spend fifteen of it on clothes. Jo was giving me the little white serge coat-and-skirt that was to be my wedding gown, and Chloe herself made me a white shirt with lawn ruffles to go with it, so, for my part, I bought some filmy underclothes, that were such a joy to me that I kissed them when they came home from the shop.

Peter invested in a Harris-tweed suit with a nice smell, also in one of blue serge, and then we went out together and bought boots exactly alike (save as to size), in

which to be married. They had grey, suède uppers and patent leather toes, so shiny that the sky reflected blue in them as we walked. They were always known as the "sky-boots," in consequence.

We were to be married on Opening Day, and it was at the R.A. we all met—"under the clock at twelve." Chloe looked lovely in rose colour, and I looked harmless in the white serge; the Changeling was almost human in a new frock of brightest tartan—her own obstinate choice, I need hardly say. Fortunately, Littlejohn, in white with blue ribbons, distracted some of the attention of passers-by from her guardian. Neither of these two innocents entered the Academy itself, but waited without upon a seat, the stared-at of all beholders.

On Opening Day one always meets everybody one knows, and I was not of course surprised to run into Evadne and Ted, who were gazing at the pictures with the scornful toleration one would expect from "Nature-Vibrationists." But I was a little astonished to meet Kissa, because I knew that her family, unlike the Penroses, never came up to town for Opening Day. She was looking charming, and with a radiance she had not had only the summer before, her brown eyes had lost their wistful expression, and if some of the woodland charm had gone from her aspect, she had gained in other ways. Her simple but smart frock had certainly never emanated from St. Annan's Vicarage. A moment later, and all was clear—explained by Kissa's blushes, and the appearance at her elbow of William, glossy in morning coat and pearl-grey trousers, with a truly British light of possession in his eye. For Kissa was ahead of me, and William had very wisely consoled himself two months earlier.

"We didn't send wedding cake, because you left no address," explained Kissa, eagerly.

"I hadn't one—then," I replied. "I have a house in Hampstead now."

"Oh, are you married?" cried Kissa.

"I'm going to be married in a few minutes. This is my fiancé, Mr. Whymperis."

Everyone beamed, but I knew Peter and William would mutually dislike each other if they lived to be a hundred. Kissa was all agog to come to my wedding, but William, murmuring something about "not intruding," drew her away. I think he didn't care about his wife mixing with people who got themselves married so casually. I was not sorry—it is a mistake to have might-have-beens at an affair of that kind. I had written to Harry—who had not consoled himself—and he had sent me the dearest letter back, but nothing would have induced him to come to my wedding, and I was glad of it.

Even without Kissa and William, we seemed to collect people like a snowball, and finally there left in taxis for the little city church which Peter and I had chosen, the Culvers, Mr. Brennan (in a new white waistcoat), Jo and Chas, the Child of Sixty Summers (all flutter and excitement), the Changeling, Littlejohn, Chloe, Peter and myself. It was a very incorrect wedding, since Chas, though wed, was best man, and Jo gave me away with a flourish. Peter and I stared nervously at the sky-boots, and Littlejohn, under the mistaken impression that the whole thing was arranged for her amusement, shrieked with mirth.

We all lunched in Soho, and Mr. Brennan stood some champagne, and afterwards lent Peter and me his car

to take us right into the country for the afternoon, while Jo and Chloe went to put the finishing touches to Secrecy Farm. Only four rooms were furnished as yet—everyone had given furniture as wedding presents—but there was a big attic for a studio, and a sunny, south room as a nursery for Littlejohn. That infant, with her attendant, was being looked after by Chloe for a week, so that Peter and I might have a little bit of honeymoon to ourselves. I can imagine no one less suited to the task than Chloe, or who would dislike it more, and I mingled admiration with gratitude. Afterwards, sad as it made us all, the Hencoop was to be given up, for Jo and Chas rejoiced at their Campden Hill flat in a painfully superior studio with a carpet, and Chloe was going to pay a long round of visits.

"You will have to go and get wed, too, Chloe," said I, at lunch, "if it's only to take you off our minds."

"Many thanks," replied she, "but there's a limit to my altruism. I shall probably never bring myself to do it at all, and I shall develop into one of those fabulously ancient crones who nod their heads and say hoarsely: 'Ah, me dears, it wasn't for want of asking, I can tell you! Not for want of asking!'"

"And no one will believe you," said I, "because no one ever does believe that, though it's invariably true."

"I think," said Chloe, "that there ought to be a compulsory register of proposals kept at Somerset House. Like wills, you know. And then one could send doubting people to look them up."

"It wouldn't save you," remarked Jo, mournfully, "they'd only say, 'Poor dear! All those proposals, and still couldn't get the man she wanted!'"

Here the Nelephant, who at church had been con-

cealed in Chloe's large chiffon muff and had nearly bitten it to pieces), tramped firmly over the table, and the question arose as to what was to become of her when Chloe's week at the Hencoop was up. I, for once in my life, was firm, and utterly refused to have her at Secrecy Farm. Who then came to our rescue, but the Child of Sixty Summers; she, it may be remembered, always had a partiality for strange animals. She now announced herself perfectly willing to adopt the Nelephant and her family, and who were we that we should tell her of that cat's unpleasant idiosyncrasies?

. . . . . .

It was evening when Peter and I arrived at Secrecy Farm. The big notice-board was gone, and the long, low house-front had been newly whitewashed, and against it the lilac and syringa, in full bloom, cast a delicate tracery of blue shadow, while the wall itself looked golden in the glow of the late sun. We pushed open the gate and walked up the little path, and round to the back of the house, where the front door had been placed by a thoughtful architect. The ricks of sad-coloured hay were gone, and no elevators rattled their iron joints in the ghostly fashion of last summer. Instead, a tall trellis-work, already thick with creeper, had been erected to hide the building, which, alas, would inevitably occur round about us. In the little garden, left to run adorably wild, the white stars of anemone lay tangled in the grass. The candles were alight on the horse-chestnut, and by the door there was a may-tree, clustered with deeply-bright pink blossom. Peter fitted the key into the lock, found that whosoever had left last had forgotten to put the latch down, and we walked straight in. We went all over the house, into the big, bare, white-

washed rooms, and into those where sketches and bits of old furniture made the place home; everywhere were flowers, and Jo and Chloe had left supper ready for us. We looked at all this, and then went up to my room, which was the attic looking towards the road. I had chosen it because there was a tall plane-tree outside, and at night the lamp at the gate threw the shadows of the leaves against the pale wall of my room, and, when a wind was abroad that shook the boughs, the shadows fled across and across the wall like a flock of big birds flying.

The lamp had not been lit yet, for the sunset still held the sky, and Peter and I went to the window and stood looking out. The clouds were heaped and tumbled in fantastic palaces of rosy towers and purple shadows, with a streak of molten light at their foot, where they touched the rim of the heath.

"There's one of your spirit-cities, Peter," I said.

"Oh, it's good, all of it," answered Peter, his arm about me, and I pressed his head against me in silence. Yes, it was good, and as I looked out at the grey-green of the Heath, the darker blots of the trees and the high arch of the sky, I saw how it might come to be even better. That there would be difficulties I knew, for once, more clearly than Peter, for this house, so sweet to me, would cease to satisfy him, and one day he would take the road again. He would come back, but always to go once more, yet whether I went with him or had to stay behind, there was always one thing which would have a power of solace, and that was our mutual knowledge of the year we had already had together. I saw it in a many-coloured flash—how disconnected and without scheme it had seemed while we were living it, and

how it all, to use one of Peter's pet phrases, "went to make a pattern."

"Yes, it's good," I answered, at last, "and we're awfully lucky to have it. And to have such friends—and £5 to go on with—and a ready-made family—and perhaps——"

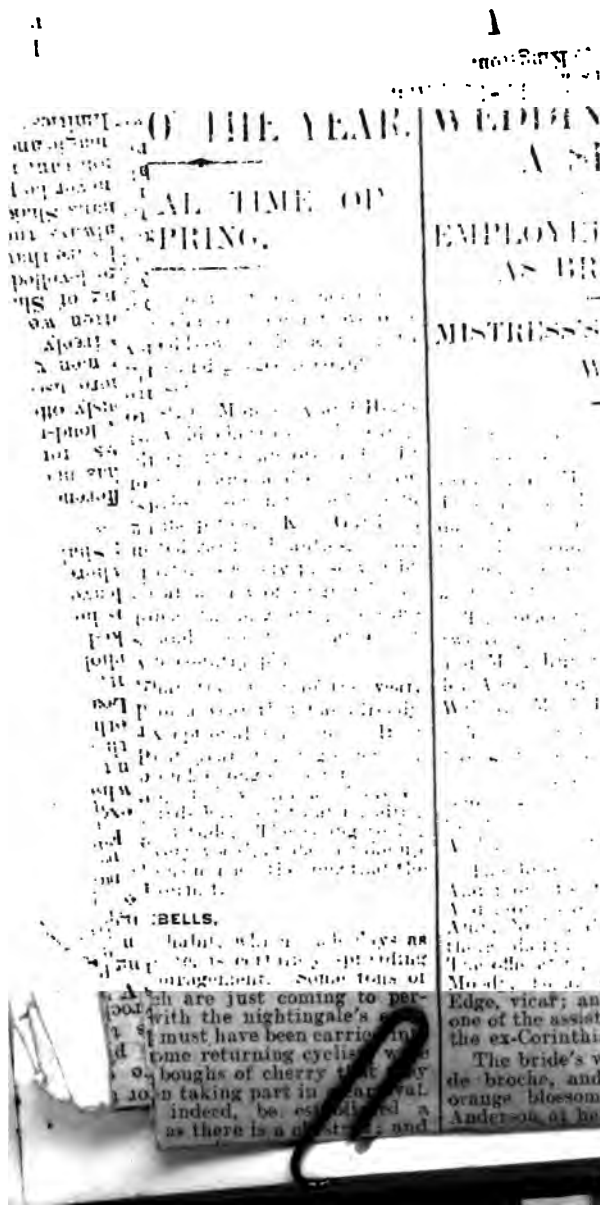
"Things would always be good where you were," said Peter, fitting the top of his head in under my chin; "you're like that. Do you know, Viv, I have a theory——"

But I slipped my hand over his mouth, and he laughed and kissed it.

"Perhaps you're right," he said, "but it wasn't a bad theory; it was about our being happy, living here. Do you know, I'm not sure a roof isn't a good thing to have, because—well, after all, true adventure is of the soul."

"Let's just be happy," I answered, "for as long as we can. Oh, Peter, I wonder—I wonder——"

THE END



OF THE YEAR.

AL TIME OF
PRING.

BELLS.

with the nightingale's
must have been carri
come returning cyclis
boughs of cherry
n taking part in
indeed, be
as there is a

WEDDIN
A

EMPLOYE
AS BRI

MISTRESS'S

Edge, vicar; and
one of the assist
the ex-Corinthia

The bride's w
de broche, and
orange blossom
Anderson at he